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THE HAUSEED DETECTIVE;



OR, SLIPPERY JIM'S DIAMOND DEAL.

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AUTHOR OF "FEARLES SAM," "JAUNTY JOE,"
"BOSTON BOB," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS FARMER.

The place, Twenty-eighth street, between
Fourth and Fifth avenues, New York. The
time nearly midnight.

A rather tall, stoutly-built individual, who

SLIPPERY JIM SAW THE BLOW COMING AND WITH A KNIFE RIPPED THE BAG
TO SHOW THE DETECTIVE THAT IT WAS EMPTY.

might have been a young man, judging by his springy step and the careless swing of his arms, but whose straggling gray whiskers and hair of the same color, that reached to the collar of his long coat of homespun, proclaimed him to be at least sixty years of age.

A farmer, of course, would be the instant verdict of any one who chanced to look at him, which opinion would be confirmed by the cakes of red New Jersey mud on his cowhide boots that would have been apparent had there been light enough to see them.

Probably a stranger in New York, for he looked about him in that gaping, bewildered manner characteristic of the "hayseed" who finds himself surrounded by brick and stone buildings, instead of the familiar trees, meadows and snake fences.

He had come down Fourth avenue at a rapid gait, with his old-fashioned carpet-bag striking against his right leg in awkward fashion at every step, and had turned into Twenty-eighth street, toward Fifth avenue, in the careless way of one who thinks it does not matter much in which direction he goes when he has lost his way, and as he reached a tall, stone-front building, evidently used for offices, he stood a moment as if to collect his thoughts and make up his mind what to do next.

The entrance to the building was a dark doorway, with a space of perhaps four feet between the door and the sidewalk.

An excellent place for a footpad to hide!

The footpad was there!

As the farmer stood looking about him, and particularly toward the sky, as if the stars might guide him, a tall, lithe, active fellow stepped noiselessly out of the doorway, and threw his right arm around the farmer's neck with a strength that proved the wiry nature of the sinews of the stranger. At the same moment his left arm was thrown across the farmer's breast and seized his right wrist with a grasp of iron.

This was the "garrote," as it is known to the New York crook, and in all ordinary cases it is enough to subdue even a very strong man.

The right arm around the neck chokes the victim into insensibility in a few moments, and the left hand holding the wrist prevents effective resistance by the victim.

The farmer emitted a low, choking sound as the thief's arm was so suddenly drawn around his neck, and then another figure came from somewhere and put its long experienced fingers into the farmer's vest pocket, from whence depended an old-fashioned watch-chain.

"Got him, Swikey?" whispered the last comer.

"Bet yer boots, cull! But he's a strugglin' like a heel in a hopera cloak, and yer want to 'urry yerself. Blest if I can 'old 'im more'n another himstant!"

Crash! Biff! Bang!

The fellow with the watch-chain in his hand received a blow in the mouth and another on the forehead, and lay on his back in the middle of the street.

"Whew!" was all he said, as he sat down on the stones with more force than elegance.

But the farmer was not troubling himself about the man on the cobblestones. He had other business on hand, and he attended to it with neatness and despatch.

It was his left hand that had disposed of the thief with two blows, and as he sent his one assailant into the middle of the street, he swung himself around and caught Swikey by the throat with his serviceable left hand, while he banged him over the head with the carpet-bag in his right.

"S'elp me! What kind of a bloomin' cove are yer?" squeaked Swikey, as he tried in vain to tear himself away from the farmer's iron grasp.

"Wal, I'm from Illinoy," drawled the farmer. "Didn't yer kind a' spot me fer a jay?"

The smile on the features of the old man, as he put this question, irritated Swikey beyond all bearing, and he tried again to get away from the farmer.

"Keep still, boy. Reckon you'd better," murmured the farmer, in a gentle tone that seemed to carry a threat with it, however.

"Say, Red, come 'ere, won't yer?" howled Swikey, as he saw his companion rise to his feet and make his way at goodly speed toward Fourth avenue.

"Not to-night, Swikey," was the derisive response. "You can handle the yap yerself now. Self-preservation is the first law of the Tenderloin."

And, to prove that he respected this law, he hustled around the corner of Fourth avenue, and made his way down town, without troubling himself further about the man he had called Swikey.

"Blarst him! That's the way with these yer cheap crooks. Always looking after their own bloomin' 'ide, and not caring a penn'orth o' pease puddin' for no one else."

Swikey uttered these remarks with an indignation that would have done credit to a highly moral man, and he did not seem to care half as much about the tight grip of the farmer on his neck as about this traitorous conduct on the part of his pal.

"I s'pose ez you'll report him to the padrone, won't yer?" remarked the farmer, in a familiar manner that made Swikey turn as far around as the grip on his throat would allow, that he might look his captor in the face.

"One of us?" he squeaked, in meaning tones.

For answer, the farmer released Swikey's neck, took his carpet-bag in his left hand, and extended his right. Swikey took it, and there might have been seen a peculiar, snake-like movement of the little finger of each, so that the two fingers twined around each other.

"S'elp me bob, who'd 'a thunk it?" gasped Swikey.

"When yer git ter be as old as yer Uncle Hezekiah Dodds, ye'll know that it is what yer don't expect as is allers comin' ter pass. Paste that in yer hat and read it a dozen times a day, till yer knows yer lesson."

The farmer spoke with a drawl, but the quick glance in his rather deep-set eyes suggested an active brain.

"Wot's yer game, and wot are yer doin' at this end of town?" asked Swikey. "An', by George, you nearly cracked the 'ole bloomin' skull on me with that carpet-bag."

"I hev a plant in New York, and I'm on my way down to the padrone's to git some likely fellow to take one end of it."

"I'm the cove to do it," interrupted Swikey.

"Air yer? I don't know about that? A feller that would work a job as clumsily as you did this can't have much of a standing in his profession, I'm thinkin'. Suppose I had been the jay you thought me, whar would you be now?"

"I'd be all right, 'cause a jay wouldn't 'ave got away with me an' Red, you can bet yer boots!"

The farmer chuckled at this indirect compliment, and gave Swikey a playful bang over the head with the carpet-bag that nearly knocked him down.

"But, what lay are yer on?" added Swikey, returning to his first inquiry.

"The Wickworth diamonds!"

Swikey uttered a long, low whistle.

"That's one of the deepest jobs as wos ever worked," he observed. "An', from wot I can learn, it was done by some one outside the gang."

He looked into the face of his companion, as if expecting some comment, but none was forthcoming. The farmer only gazed ahead into vacancy, as if he had no opinion—to express, at least.

"A downy cove!" muttered Swikey, under his breath; "e won't give 'imself away."

"Not to a slob like you, anyhow," quickly retorted the other. His hearing seemed to be almost preternaturally sharp. "However, if you like to go into

this thing with me, I'll make it worth your while."

"Wot to do?"

"To get a whack at the swag, that's all. Them diamonds were taken in a way as wasn't square, anyhow, and I'm goin' ter hev them. That's all thar is about it. They air worth \$200,000, and I kin git \$50,000 for them in Chicago, sure, an' perhaps more in Ne v York."

"An' wot do yer want me to do?"

"Keep yer mouth shut, in the first place, and do as I tell yer, in the second."

There was no gainsaying the quiet air of command of the old farmer, and Swikey was resigned to wait for orders, when, suddenly, a dark shadow stepped out of a doorway they were passing (for they had been walking toward Broadway while talking), and the heavy hand of a policeman was laid on Swikey's shoulder.

The prisoner twisted quickly and violently, but the officer maintained his hold as he said, in quiet, matter-of-fact tones:

"Don't try it, Swikey! I want you for that Eighth avenue holdup, and I'll just give you a ride."

"Wot 'old-up, Mr. Hofficer? Wot are yer allers a chivvin' a poor cove for, when 'e's trying to lead a honest life? It's cruel, that's wot it is."

"Oh, stow that!" returned the officer, gruffly, as he dragged the writhing Swikey in the direction of the patrol box. "Be gob, it's yerself that's the innocent boy, so ye are!"

Swikey looked appealingly toward the farmer, who was looking passively on, and the officer caught the glance, as he said, threateningly:

"If that yap says a word, be the saints I'll take him, too."

Like a flash Hezekiah Dodds, as the farmer had called himself, dropped his bag, dragged Swikey out of the officer's grasp and, catching the astonished blue-coat by the two shoulders, whispered something in his ear.

The effect of this whisper was almost marvelous.

The officer touched his cap in a respectful manner, and, turning on his heel, marched away with as quick a step as his dignity would allow, while Swikey fairly gasped with astonishment.

"Wot did you say to the bloke?" he asked, as Hezekiah carelessly picked up his bag and continued his stroll toward Broadway.

"What did I tell yer about keeping your mouth shet?" was the rather unsatisfactory answer. "Stop that car," he continued, as they reached the corner of Broadway.

Swikey obeyed, and in another minute the two were sitting quietly in the corner of the big cable car, looking more innocent and commonplace than many of the other occupants, who were probably respectable citizens.

CHAPTER II.

SLIPPERY JIM.

At the corner of Bond street the farmer stepped off the car, followed by the obsequious Swikey. A short walk took them to the upper end of Mott street, where the inhabitants are as generally Italian as those at the other extremity of the long thoroughfare are almost exclusively Chinese.

Into the dirty entry of one of the big brick tenements the farmer marched with the air of a man who knew his way, still followed by Swikey.

They stumbled over the forms of more than one sleeper, stretched out in the hallway for the sake of the coolness, and a muttered "Maladetto!" occasionally made Swikey start, for he knew that these Italians nearly always carried knives, and that they were prone to use them on slight provocation.

Hezekiah, however, took no notice, but walked up the wide staircase that had been trodden by haughty Knickerbockers, clad in velvets, silks and laces, many and many a time a century ago.

To-night the stairs were bare save for the grease and grime that lay so thick upon the oaken boards, and Hezekiah

evidently had no sentiment about the matter as he stepped over a snoring little Italian who was lying in a most perilous attitude on a landing where the broken railing offered no protection from a fearful fall to the lower floor if he should happen to roll over in his sleep.

Up two flights, and then Hezekiah knocked at a door that lay back in the deep shadow in a corner of the landing.

There was no response, but a streak of light illumined the face of the farmer for a moment, as what appeared to be a knot-hole in the door was uncovered, and then hastily stopped up again.

Hezekiah did not move, or trouble himself about the precautions taken by the occupants of the room to find out who was waiting, and when the door was flung open, with a gush of hot air and light into the darkness in which he and Swikey had been standing, he walked in as unconcerned as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a farmer from "Illinoy" to visit a tenement house after midnight in the very heart of the Italian quarter of New York.

The room in which the two found themselves was a luxuriously furnished apartment, rather at variance with the style of house in which it was situated. A bookcase, stored with handsomely bound volumes by authors that bespoke the taste and discernment of the possessor, covered the wall opposite the door, a piano stood against another wall, and a magnificently carved desk of dark oak, quaintly designed and bearing tokens of age, was in front of the bookcase. Pictures by masters, ancient and modern, hung upon the walls, Persian carpets and rich rugs covered the floor, which was of polished hard wood, as could be seen here and there where the rugs and carpets left small spaces, and curtains of the rarest fine lace covered the two windows that gave upon the back of the house.

There were three persons in the room, at each of which the farmer gave a swift glance in turn as he entered.

A young girl of singular beauty stood behind the door that she had opened to admit Hezekiah and Swikey, and the scornful look with which she responded to Swikey's evident admiration as she closed the door gave token that he was not a favorite of hers.

The chair behind the big desk was occupied by a stout, middle aged man, with piercing black eyes, under shaggy lashes, a shock of curly black hair hanging from beneath a skull cap of bright colored silk, and the clear-cut features characteristic of the Italian race. He wore a short smoking jacket of quilted satin, confined at the waist by a scarf of rainbow-colored cashmere.

He was busy writing, but looked up long enough to bestow a nod of recognition upon the farmer, taking no notice at all of the cringing Swikey.

The third person in the room was the only one who seemed disconcerted by the entrance of the visitors.

He was a small, red-headed young man, with a furtive manner and a disagreeable habit of rubbing his fingers over his thumb on either hand when he had nothing else to do.

At this moment, as he saw the farmer come in, followed by Swikey, his thumbs and fingers were working so rapidly that he might have been trying to wear the points of his fingers to even sharper ends than they possessed already.

"What's the trouble, young man?" drawled the farmer, with a smile, evidently enjoying the embarrassment of the other. "Anything wrong with your fingers?"

"Naw!" was the short response, as the speaker thrust his hands behind him.

"Oh, I thought mebbe you'd been tryin' to hold up a jay somewhar, and got the worst of it."

"Ha, ha!" from Swikey, in an explosive chuckle.

"Hold on!" called out Hezekiah, as the red-headed young man reached the door, and placed his hand upon the fastening.

"We may want you."

"Well, you've got me," was the sullen rejoinder.

"Bet yer boots I hev!"

And, to prove that his words were not uttered in mere idleness, the farmer seized him by the shoulder and plumped him into a chair by the side of the man at the desk and coolly placed one of his feet on the young man's knees to hold him there.

Then he laid his hand on the back of that of the Italian which was holding the pen with the same air of being master of the situation which had distinguished him from the moment he had knocked down "Red the Fox" on Twenty-eighth street—that same "Red the Fox" being none other than the red-headed young man now sitting by the side of the desk, with the farmer's foot on his knees, as the reader has doubtless surmised.

"Padrone," drawled Hezekiah.

"Whata you wanta, eh?"

The son of Italy spoke in a rich bass, without any apparent interest in the question, and not even looking up from the paper upon which he had been writing.

"First, I want to know who is in the other room."

"Santa Maria! No one."

"Don't lie, padrone."

"Buta—"

"I told you not to lie!" interrupted the farmer, fiercely, while Swikey turned a bluish white at the temerity of the farmer in thus speaking to the man who could hang dozens of people in New York if he chose to tell all he knew.

The young girl, who had seated herself at the piano, and was playing a dreamy air with the touch of a finished musician, looked at the farmer in some surprise, but did not stop playing. Perhaps she was used to strange proceedings in that room.

As Hezekiah turned upon the padrone, he moved toward the back of the Italian's chair, and opening one of the glass doors of the bookcase, seized a volume of the "Encyclopedia Britannica" that occupied one of the shelves and drew it toward him.

Instead of the book coming out into his hand, something extraordinary happened.

A section of the bookcase, books and all, came forward, and showed a narrow doorway leading into darkness.

Without hesitation, Hezekiah walked through the doorway; then a blaze of light appeared in the opening, and showed that there was a room behind the bookcase, furnished cheaply with a bed and a common washstand, with white pitcher and bowl, such as can be found in many a bedroom in a fourth-class hotel or boarding house in New York.

The room was empty!

As the farmer stepped through the secret door it was slammed to, and he was a prisoner.

A smile curled Hezekiah's lip as he looked at the place where the secret doorway had been, but that now looked like part of the pattern of the gaudy wallpaper.

He seized his soft, dusty hat by the crown and lifted it from his head, as if to cool his brain, and as he did so, the gray, straggling hair came with it, and revealed a mass of close curls of rich, glossy brown, in bright contrast to the gray wig.

The removing of the wig had the effect of changing the hoosier-looking farmer into a handsome, quick-sighted man of about thirty-five, and explained the fact that the old fellow was not so slow as might have been expected of a man of his years when made up for an elderly farmer.

"Padrone, I'll make it hot for you," muttered the detective—for a detective of course he was. "You can't play a trick like this on Jack Bowles, and get away. Some one left this room as I came into it, and I know where he went. The padrone must think that I don't know all the tricks of the place."

He put his hand to the electric switch that he had turned as he entered the

room, putting on the light, and this time he turned it the other way, and left the apartment in black darkness.

He stood perfectly still, with his hand still on the switch, for at least two minutes; then his quick ear caught the sound of a creaking board.

With a simultaneous movement, he turned on the light again, and sprang like a cat in the direction of the creaking.

"Curse you! what are you doing?" came in stifled accents from a young man with clear-cut features and a black mustache, who found himself struggling in the grasp of the detective.

"It's no use, Jim! I have you this time. Drop that bag!"

The man he called Jim had in his hand a carpet-bag so much like that which the detective had brought with him into the room, and which was lying on the floor behind him, that they could not have been told apart.

"What should I drop it for? It isn't yours, is it?"

"Drop it, I tell you!"

"I won't!"

"Yes, you will!"

"Will I?"

Jim Slider, or "Slippery Jim," as he was known to his companions, was a desperate man, and was playing a desperate game.

The detective had him firmly by the throat, but there was little difference in the relative strength of the two. So Jim Slider with one of those tricks in which he was an expert, managed to throw the detective to one side, and release himself, for an instant.

That instant was enough. Out went the light, and the detective, momentarily dazed by the suddenness of the movement, did not realize on which side his assailant stood.

But, only for a moment! He touched the switch—up went the light, and Hezekiah Dodds—or Jack Bowles, as the reader pleases—was swinging a chair over the head of Jim Slider with a ferocity that meant a broken skull for that individual when it should fall.

Slippery Jim saw the blow coming, and, quick as lightning, he drew a big knife, and—ripped open the bag in his hand, to show the detective that it was empty!

"Fooled, eh, Jack?" laughed Jim, as the detective held the chair poised in the air.

"Yes. But take this, anyhow!" yelled Bowles, as he flung the chair with all his force at the head of the smiling rascal.

There was a crash, and the chair was splintered against the wall, but Slippery Jim, true to his nickname, had disappeared, as mysteriously as if he had melted away.

CHAPTER III.

A DOUBLE CROSS.

When Slippery Jim disappeared, there was nothing very extraordinary in it, after all. He knew the secret of the bookcase door, and as the detective raised the chair, Jim pressed the spring that released the door, and squeezed through it, closing it with a bang just as the chair reached the spot.

"Whew!" he muttered, as he stood by the side of the padrone, still busy with his writing, and undisturbed by all the bustle of the last few moments. "Whew! That 'Splicer' is getting worse every day. I'll have to shut off his wind some day. I'm afraid. He interferes with business too much. Eh, little girl!"

He placed his hand on the young girl's head, and she drew back with a shudder, as if a loathsome insect had touched her.

"Leta the girl alone!" commanded the padrone, without looking up from his writing, although he evidently saw everything in the room.

"I wasn't hurting her, padrone," said Jim.

"Donta you talka to me. Santa Maria! Donta you talka to me."

The padrone arose from his desk, and, walking over to the girl, placed his hand protectingly upon her head.

"Well, don't get mad, padrone. I have

saved the swag from that jay detective, anyhow," growled Jim, in an injured tone.

"Av yer? Well, s'help me bob, I wouldn't bet a button on that," put in Swikey, who had been sitting in a corner of the room, trying to collect his scattered wits, that had been hopelessly muddled by the events of the last hour or two.

Slippery Jim had too much contempt for Swikey to answer. The fellow whose line of lawless work was stealing diamonds and other treasure from houses that were guarded in every way that modern ingenuity could invent considered himself a long way above the common footpad, like Swikey, and the sneaking pickpocket, of which Red the Fox was a full-blown specimen.

"What shall I do with the Splicer?" asked Jim, looking deferentially at the padrone.

"Do nothing," answered the padrone, shortly.

"Why?"

The Italian threw open the bookcase door and pointed into the other room without looking into it.

"Well, strike me vulgar if 'e ain't gone!" ejaculated Swikey.

Slippery Jim rushed into the room and uttered an imprecation.

"Whata you expecta, eh?" said the Italian, contemptuously. "You supposa that Jacka Bowles, the Splicer, the sharpest detective in New Yorka, stay there for you to catcha?"

But Slippery Jim was not listening to the padrone. Instead, he was looking through and through a carpet-bag in his hand—not the one that he had cut open in the presence of the detective, but another, exactly like it, and which he had carried out with him, hidden from Bowles when he had disappeared through the bookcase door.

"Wot the bloomin' crickets is the matter?" cried Swikey.

"He's got them!" gasped Slippery Jim, looking fearfully into the face of the padrone.

"Got whata?"

"The diamonds."

The padrone's face grew livid, but he uttered no word as he tore the carpet-bag out of the hand of the trembling Jim and examined it carefully.

The bag was empty, and Jim seemed to feel that it was laughing at him, and that the laugh was something like that of Hezekiah Dodds, of Joliet, otherwise Jack Bowles, the Splicer, whose cognomen was obtained from the fact that he never used handcuffs, but could splice a knot in a rope around a prisoner's wrists that no one could open but the detective himself.

"Downa the front stairs," commanded the padrone, in suppressed tones, that conveyed a menace not to be disregarded.

Red the Fox caught the padrone's eye as he spoke, and the young man made a leap for the door on the instant.

"You too, Swikey," added the Italian. "And keep him in sight when you catcha him."

The two were out of the house and in the street almost before the last words were out of the padrone's mouth.

"Beda!" he commanded, as he looked at the girl, and she disappeared through the door to the outside hall, on her way to her apartment on the floor above, leaving the padrone and Slippery Jim alone.

"Now, Jima, tell me whata this means," demanded the padrone, as he seated himself at his desk, with his feet on it, and coolly rolled a cigarette and lighted it.

There was no excitement to be noted in the face of this quiet, powerfully built Italian, save in the glow of his dark eyes, that almost seemed to contain a fire of their own. That glow was noted by the other and he knew that it meant the padrone was in no mood for trifling.

"I had the Wickworth diamonds in the bag that I had had made just like the Splicer's, because I knew the lay he was

on, and I wanted to have a chance to work the change on him if he got me in a tight place, as I expected he would."

The padrone puffed at his cigarette and nodded that he understood.

"When he came banging through that door in the book—"

Bang, came a small book at the speaker's head, stopping him in the middle of the word, while the padrone, who had thrown the missile, continued to smoke calmly.

"All right, padrone. You did right to remind me that I was breaking the rules," observed Slippery Jim, humbly. "I didn't mean to do it. I know I ought not to mention the workings of the crib like that, but the word slipped out."

"Go on witha your story," interrupted the padrone.

Slippery Jim resumed: "When the Splicer came into the room I was just looking over the stones, ready to take them down to Cohen's, and in another minute would have been safe out of the way. As it was, I used the trap in the corner, and was waiting down there for him to get out, when he fooled me by putting out the light and I thought he had gone."

"Well?"

"Well, I came out, and then he had me by the throat. I let go of the bag for just a minute while I snatched up his, that he had dropped in the middle of the floor. When I threw him a cross-buttock I thought I had him sure, and it was easy for me to cut open his empty bag and show him there was nothing in it."

"Thena, what did he do?"

Slippery Jim cowered like a kicked dog as he muttered: "I don't know, but he must have sneaked the stones out of the other bag while I was throwing him, so that he had the laugh on me, after all."

"Whata were the diamonds in?"

"A chamois leather bag."

"Loose?"

"Yes. There's a hundred of them and they average \$2,000 each—some less—some more. Every one of them finest water, blue-white stones."

The padrone drew in his breath with a hissing sound, expressive of the deepest enjoyment, as the other described the diamonds. Then he shook his head, as he muttered.

"And you let them go!"

Slippery Jim had nothing to say, but sat still, waiting for the padrone's next command.

"Where are the settings?" asked the padrone.

"Down at Cohen's."

"In what shape?"

"Rings, pins, watch charms and a tiara."

"When willa data Cohen melta them downa?"

"He's done it already, I guess."

"Go and see that he hasa."

"All right."

Slippery Jim went cautiously to the door, listened a moment, and let himself out. As he did so the padrone fastened it inside with a double bolt, and then, going to the bookcase, opened it, and admitted the detective.

"Well, padrone, Slippery Jim was not quite slick enough for me that time."

The detective spoke in a careless tone, but the padrone saw the quick glance over the room, and he knew that Jack Bowles was on the lookout for treachery.

"You havea the diamonds?"

"Where are the settings?" asked the detective, instead of replying to the padrone's query.

"Santa Maria! How doa I knowa data?"

"Don't be too smart, padrone. You know it won't pay with me. You are protected because the police know you keep the crooks in some sort of order, and can produce them when they are wanted. But don't presume too much on that."

The Italian shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"I havea nota seen the settings. I helpa you to get the dimon', but I nota know where the settings. Good nighta, Signor Bowles. I wanta to go to bed."

The detective burst into a loud laugh, as he hit the padrone a thundering whack between the shoulders.

"Durn my skin if you ain't a hefty old humbug!" he exclaimed, in his farmer dialect. "You ought to be in a museum on the Bowery." Then, changing his tone to one of determination that could not be mistaken, he said, "You have sent Slippery Jim down to Cohen's to see whether the settings are in the melting pot, and I mean to make you go there with me."

"Santa Maria! It is impossible. I musta go to beda. My childa cannot be left alone."

"What child?"

"My Marcia—my leetle girila. She havea no one buta her father."

"Padrone, this will not avail. I mean to make you go with me to Cohen's, or—"

There was something in the detective's tone that warned the Italian, for it was not necessary for the sentence to be finished to make the padrone understand that the detective would place him in the hands of the police if he did not comply.

"Wella, I go. My leetle Marcia will have to stay by herself while I go with you. But I do nota know whether we can get into Cohen's to-nighta."

"We'll get in," declared the detective, grimly.

Without another word the padrone placed a large, flapping soft hat upon his head, and taking a thick stick, with a loaded end, in his hand, motioned for the detective to go out.

The detective, in his character of Hezekiah Dodds, slouched out of the door of the tenement, and looked around him sharply, but with apparent carelessness, as the padrone joined him on the sidewalk.

"Wherea the diamonds?" asked the Italian, as they walked swiftly down Mott street.

"Mind yer own business, durn yer," was the drawling reply of his companion, and the padrone relapsed into silence.

They walked the whole length of Mott street and were passing one of those curious places where the Chinese live in crowds like rats in a hole, when the detective suddenly dropped behind the Italian, and, with a sudden vigorous movement, grabbed by the necks two men following them, and brought their foreheads together with a sharp rap, accompanied by a double cry of pain.

"Wot the bloomin' dickens are yer adoin' on?" demanded the disconcerted Swikey, as he tried to squirm out of the iron grasp of the detective.

"Ow! Ow! squeaked Red the Fox.

The detective laughed contemptuously, and flung the two rascals into the middle of the street.

"Come within my reach again before daylight and I'll give you a lesson you'll never forget," he said, quietly. "Now, git!"

The two thieves disappeared with a celerity that could be explained only on the assumption that they knew every inch of the ground in that neighborhood, and that they had access to all the holes used by the astute Chinamen in case of a raid on their fantan or other illegal proceedings by the constituted authorities.

"Here's Cohen's," continued the detective, as he ran lightly up a flight of stone steps leading to a typical Chinese tenement.

CHAPTER IV.

BEARDING THE LION.

The padrone followed Jack Bowles up the steps and went into the back room on the parlor floor.

It was a large apartment, but partitioned off with thin boards, covered with Chinese inscriptions and figures, while images and ornaments dear to the Mon-

golian heart were to be seen on every hand—extraordinary statuettes, bearing in some cases a fantastic resemblance to human beings, but in most instances to fabled animals of the dragon family.

A large kitchen stove glowed brightly with a fierce fire, and the heat was almost unbearable to the detective, although a fat Chinaman who stood innocently counting the beads on a Chinese mathematical machine showed no signs of discomfort.

The Chinaman looked out of the corners of his slanting eyes at the two visitors, but made no movement toward greeting them.

The detective stepped up behind him, the heathen watching him stealthily as he approached, and laid his hand on the long, claw-like fingers that were deftly moving the beads along the wires of the machine.

"Counting your money, Levi?"

There was the faintest vestige of a smile on the face of the Chinaman, but he did not answer. He stood still, waiting for the detective to release his fingers.

"Do you hear what I say?" asked the detective.

"Whatee you mean?"

"Oh, give us a rest on that pigeon English."

The detective spoke irritably, and there was a momentary glance of intelligence from the padrone to the Chinaman that conveyed warning of the danger of trifling.

"Practice makes perfect, Splicer," said the Chinaman, in perfect English, without a trace of Chinese accent, "and I always talk that way as a matter of business."

"As a matter of business, who is behind that screen?" demanded the detective.

He did not wait for an answer, but went behind, and pushed aside the painted screen, revealing what appeared to be a Chinaman busy at an ironing board.

The detective calmly seized the Chinaman by his pigtail and pulled him away from the board, causing him to squirt a mouthful of water all over the wall of the small room, as he squeaked, with an unmistakable Chinese accent:

"Oh, you vellee muchee bad mans! Whatee you touch Chinaman for? I tellee the boss, if you notee letee me be."

There was a look of fear on the yellow face of this heathen that could not be mistaken, and it was easy to see that he was really what he appeared to be—a native Mongolian, and not an imitation like Levi Cohen.

"Sit down!" commanded the detective, contemptuously, or I'll pull the pigtail out of you."

He made a slight move in the direction of the terrified Chinaman that caused him to shrink behind his master, Levi, in abject fear.

"Sit down, Charlie Ling," muttered Levi, as he watched the detective out of the corners of his eyes, that were so deftly painted and made up that they looked enough like those of a Chinaman to have deceived any ordinary and casual glance.

The padrone had been standing quietly at the door, watching the scene, without any attempt to interfere, although a quick glance had passed between him and Levi that clearly signified that there was nothing to be done but to let things take their course at this present juncture.

"You're a nice crowd of respectable young men, aren't yer?" said the detective, lightly, as he overturned the ironing board with one twitch of his powerful hand, and showed that the table, which was hung around with a curtain of chintz such as is often found in Chinese laundries, was really the means of approach to a secret chamber below.

Charlie Ling rushed forward involuntarily as the detective uncovered the secret, but Levi took him by the shoulder and shoved him back into his chair.

"Father Abraham! What you doin' when a shentleman comes to see us? Sit down vonce. Where's your manners?"

Levi generally spoke without any accent, but when he was excited he dropped unconsciously into the vernacular of his race, and there was no mistaking the fact that this burly fellow in the dress and with the appearance of a Chinaman was really a Hebrew by descent as well as in name.

Jack Bowles, the Splicer, had dropped the drawling speech and slow manner of the farmer in the importance of the work before him and moved in the brisk style natural to him in his own proper person.

"Padrone!" said the detective, shortly.

"Wella?"

"Stay here."

"Si, Signor."

"If you move or let either of these two rascals move while I am below I—well, you know what will happen."

There was something grating in the voice of the detective as he uttered the significant words that conveyed a mysterious threat; they seemed to freeze the three listeners until he had leaped lightly over the edge of the false table, and disappeared in the middle.

Whatever might be the influence wielded by the Splicer in this place, where it would seem so easy to put even a detective out of the way for ever, it is certain that it was felt by the three men who were left looking into each other's faces with a dismayed expression as the Splicer sank out of sight.

"Santa Maria!" ejaculated the Italian, with a deep growl of disgust.

"Father Abraham!" burst from Levi Cohen.

"Hully chee!" squeaked Charlie Ling.

Then Levi shaped his mouth into the words, "Where are the diamonds now?" without uttering a sound.

The padrone understood him.

"He has them," he answered, in the same inaudible manner.

Charlie Ling did not understand what was passing between the padrone and Levi, and he was too much in awe of both of them to ask, but he knew it had some relation to the detective, and he grinned expectantly.

"We must get them," said the silent lips of Cohen.

The padrone shook his head hopelessly. He had too much respect for the detective's courage and influence to commit himself to any undertaking that would bring him into direct conflict with that individual unless he was sure that all the cards were in his (the padrone's) hands.

"But, s'hellup me, he's got the stones, my tear!" burst from the Jew, who could no longer hold himself in.

"Shuta up!" growled the padrone, fiercely.

"Me no shuttee up! Me no say anything!" put in Charlie Ling, who had fallen into a reverie, and thought he was addressed.

For reply, the padrone gave the Chinaman a shove that laid him flat on the floor, just as Swipey cautiously pushed open the door and put his head inside.

"Oh, Swipee!" squeaked the Chinaman, as he rose to his feet, and seized the newcomer by the arm and pointed toward the ironing table, inside which the detective had disappeared.

The intention of Charlie Ling to tell the whole story to Swipey was so evident that Levi, in an ecstasy of rage, seized the unlucky Chinaman by the pigtail, and, opening the door, shot him down the steps to the street with one well-directed kick.

The padrone grinned at this incident, but instantly became grave, as he whispered in Swipey's ear:

"He's down in the crib, and you'd better geta, or he'll killa you, sure."

Swipey shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Do you knowa how he willa killa you?"

Swipey looked into the face of the padrone curiously, and the Italian made a motion of passing a rope around his neck

and hitching up his head sideways that was very significant of hanging.

Cohen came back to the room at this moment, and he smiled at this pantomime, but could not resist the temptation to correct Levi by saying:

"Not in this State, padrone. They have a better way, s'hellup me cracious. They sits you in a chair, mine tear, an' they turns a little handle, mine tear, an' they kills you by a stroke of lightning, my tear, all nice and business-like, my tear."

"I don't like them bloomin' jokes," grumbled Swipey, in low tones.

"Where's the Splicer?"

The padrone pointed to the floor.

"Who's down there?"

"Slippery Jim."

"Any one else?"

The padrone looked inquiringly at Levi, who had assumed the meek and vacant manner of the Chinaman he represented, and who shook his head blandly.

"No one?" whispered the padrone.

"No one."

The English crook hit himself in the chest, stretched out his two arms one by one, as if to test his muscle, and exclaimed, softly:

"Who'll go down with me into that there bloomin' cellar and do the Splicer?"

The padrone, Cohen, and Charlie Ling, who had crept in quietly, looked at Swipey as if they could not comprehend his boldness, but he folded his arms and nodded his head determinedly, and they could not doubt that he meant what he said.

Here was this detective, in the room below, with \$200,000 worth of diamonds concealed about his person somewhere, and with the setting of the Wickworth jewels melting in a brazier, as they knew, and not a friend within reach. He might cry for help as much as he pleased in this basement of the Chinaman's house, but no one would hear him, and if he never came out alive, who was to be the wiser?

The terror inspired in the bosoms of the evil-doers by this detective made the padrone and Levi Cohen actually gasp for breath at the temerity of the English thief's suggestion, but they could not help weighing the chances of the move being successful, after all.

"Shall ve try it?" asked the Jew, in the same noiseless way as before, by merely moving his lips and shaping the words.

"Are you game?" was the padrone's response.

Swipey looked from one to the other with an expression that said with perfect plainness: "Wot the bloomin' deuce does all this yer mean?"

Then he broke out, in desperation:

"If you two images is a-goin' ter do it, say so, an' don't stand there a-mouthin' at each other as if you 'ad the bloomin' jim-jams!"

The padrone turned upon him fiercely, and raised his hand as if to strike him for his insolence. But Swipey was desperate, and even his respect for the padrone had sunk out of sight now.

"Hurrah! Bravo!" burst from Charlie Ling.

Levi Cohen aimed a blow at Ling's head, which the Chinaman dodged dexterously, and the Jew, without another word, leaped lightly into the space inside the table and disappeared.

As he did so, there was the sound of a pistol-shot, muffled by the floor between them and the place below, and at the same instant Charlie Ling uttered a cry of pain, and jumped about the room on one foot, as he nursed the other with his hand.

"It's now or never, padrone!" yelled Swipey, as he, too, jumped into the table.

CHAPTER V. IN THE TOILS.

When the detective jumped into the table from which he had hurled the ironing-board, he did not go out of the room immediately, although the padrone and Jew thought he did. He stopped, so that he was out of their sight, and then peeped

through a small rent in the chintz to see what they would do.

He saw them speaking to each other in the soundless way already described, and smiled as he read plainly from the lips of the two men what they were saying about him and the diamonds.

Having made up his mind that it was perfectly safe to leave these two fellows for a few moments, he sank through the floor.

The house was a mass of traps and secret panels, but the Splicer was acquainted with all of them. That there was one inside this table he knew perfectly, and when he threw off the board and made Charlie spit out the water, it was with reference to his next move.

The room in which he found himself was a little below the level of the street, and was bricked around with a flooring of earth and dirt. It was dark, save from the light that came from a brazier on one side, and on which a crucible held some boiling yellow metal.

Not a soul was in the place save himself.

"Sharp lot, here!" he muttered. "But I can get the gold, even if it is melted."

Turning off the gas under the brazier, and with his eye on the opening over his head, inside the table, he waited for developments.

He had not long to wait, for, with a bound, Levi dropped into the cellar, and tried to peer into the gloom, but did not venture to move from the spot until his eyes became accustomed to the darkness.

Then there was a pistol-shot, so close to him that he started, involuntarily, as he caught a glimpse of the Splicer standing in front of the brazier, in the flash of the pistol, and noted that the detective was smiling in a most exasperating way.

Down came Swikey, almost on top of him, and, as he felt himself encircled by the iron-like arms of the detective, another smaller figure darkened the opening, and the squeaky voice of Red the Fox broke in:

"Hold him, Levi! The padrone is here! We'll have the dead wood on the mug this time!"

The detective was a powerful and active man, but he was only one man, after all, and could not hold his own against three desperate opponents, none of whom valued his life as against the acquisition of the treasure in the detective's possession.

The revolver was dashed from his hand by a smoothing iron in the hand of Red the Fox, and at the same moment Swikey sprang upon his back, with his arm around the Splicer's neck in the tight hug of the garrote, releasing Levi, and adding one more to the detective's assailants.

With his muscles drawn to their extreme tension, the detective held the three ruffians at bay for a moment. But the power of numbers was too much for him, and he was forced backward, and lay, helpless, on his back, with Swikey and Red holding him down, while Levi balanced the revolver significantly in his hand.

At this moment Slippery Jim appeared on the scene, in a mysterious manner, as if he had come through the wall.

"Got him, eh? Sorry I couldn't get back before, but I wanted to see if the other crib was safe," he explained, taking the capture of the detective quite as a matter of course.

He kicked the recumbent figure, and grinned maliciously in the light that came down through the trap.

"Thought you could get away with Jim Slider, did you, Jack Bowles, eh?"

The detective did not answer in words, but there was a gleam in his eye that made Slippery Jim shudder, in spite of himself.

"Go through him!" he commanded, shortly, as if he did not care to continue the colloquy with the prisoner.

"Me go through him. Me touchee him for five. He, he!"

Charlie Ling was sitting on the edge of the table above, with his feet dangling over the hole, and his yellow face wrinkled into a smile of intense enjoyment.

"Shut up!" put in the harsh voice of the padrone, and Charlie Ling turned a somersault into the cellar, and would perhaps have broken his skull had he not fallen in a heap on Levi, thus saving himself to some extent.

Levi contented himself with giving the Chinaman a shove that sent him into a corner, just as the padrone let himself down into the midst of the group.

"Geta upstairs, and watcha the door!" he growled to Charlie Ling, and that volatile individual sprang up through the trap, and was heard to indulge in a war dance overhead, on his way to the front door, which he locked and bolted.

The padrone knelt by the side of the detective, and deliberately went through his pockets.

Not a vestige of the diamonds could he find; and, what was still more peculiar, there was nothing else in the detective's pockets, or anywhere about him.

"You musta have soma mon," growled the padrone.

Jack Bowles only smiled.

"Py cracious! This is sinful, my tear," broke in Levi, with a ghastly grin.

"A bloomin' shame!" added Swikey.

"He ain't the mug to go round with empty pockets," declared Red the Fox.

The four rascals were nonplussed. Here was Jack Bowles, the detective dreaded by the whole crooked fraternity of New York and Chicago, in their power, and supposed to have \$200,000 worth of diamonds with him. Yet, when they search him, they can not only find no diamonds, but his pockets do not contain anything else. Not even a penknife, a purse, a key, or any of the many things that might be found in the pockets of the average man.

"Curse him! They must be somewhere!" hissed Slippery Jim, as he gazed into the face of the detective with a scowl that proved how ready he would have been to commit murder to obtain what he sought.

Again the detective smiled in that calm, provoking manner.

With a curse, Slippery Jim raised his foot, and would have dashed his heel into the defenseless face of Jack the Splicer had not Levi divined his purpose, and pushed him aside just in the nick of time.

With a howl of rage, Slippery Jim tried to break away from Levi and renew his attack upon the detective, but Levi held him firmly.

"Vot you do? Don't you know he would never quit hunting you till he brought you down, my tear? Cracious! You vos getting more foolish efery day you live!"

"He'll never get out of here alive!" muttered Jim.

During this short dialogue Red the Fox had been busily fumbling at the neck of the detective. Something had caught his eye, as Bowles lay on the ground, and, quick as a weasel, he had stooped to find out whether certain suspicions could be verified.

Now he uttered a cry of satisfaction as he thrust one of his long, slender fingers between the detective's collar and his neck, and felt a piece of stiff paper.

"Vot vos it, Red?" queried Levi.

For answer Red the Fox pulled out a piece of writing paper that had been neatly folded and thrust into the space inside the collar.

The padrone pounced upon it and held it up to the light.

"Whata this? It have nota writing on it."

Slippery Jim, Levi, and the padrone all examined the paper closely, but could not make anything of it. It was perfectly plain so far as writing was concerned, but it was punched with small holes all over it, apparently without any regularity, and, so far as could be seen, without any object.

"Looks like a pattern for a lace collar," grumbled Slippery Jim.

"That's what it is," put in the detective, eagerly.

No sooner had he spoken than he realized his mistake.

There was a quick glance at him by the padrone and Levi, both of them as quick-

witted and cunning as any rascals that made their living by crooked work, and he knew that their suspicions were aroused—that they would never be allayed till they understood why he was carrying about with him this apparently worthless scrap of paper.

"I don't believe you, my tear," said Levi, with a cunning leer.

"You were a little too bloomin' anxious that there time, Jack Bowles," observed Swikey. "That ain't no lace collar. Is it?"

"No more than I'm a Vanderbilt," responded Red the Fox.

The padrone did not say anything, but he placed the paper carefully in his pocketbook, and motioned to Swikey and Red the Fox in a manner that they evidently understood.

"Charlie!" cried Levi, and the Chinaman's twinkling eyes appeared at the trap above. "Throw down that rope!"

"Allee lightee!" and a mass of stout cord, about as thick as an ordinary clothes line came down, dropping on Levi's head, as if by accident, although as Charlie Ling was heard to chuckle gleefully in the room above, it is possible he did it on purpose.

Jim Slider assisted Red and Swikey to tie the hands and feet of the detective, which they did in a particularly careful way, knowing that while he had been nicknamed the "Splicer" on account of his cleverness in making complicated knots, he was equally skillful in untying them.

So his hands were tied behind his back and his ankles were knotted together so tightly that it seemed as if nothing could release him save a sharp knife, more especially that all three of the rascals united their strength in pulling the knots to the very extreme of hardness.

"Now go through hima again!" commanded the padrone, and his companions obeyed him with a will. They unfastened every article of clothing he wore and searched him thoroughly. They had already taken off his shoes and stockings and searched them, so that he was now in his bare feet.

Nothing rewarded their efforts. All they had found was this scrap of paper with the irregular and meaningless holes in it, and they were obliged to admit to themselves and each other that the Splicer had proved too keen for them, and had secreted the diamonds somewhere so that they could not get them this moment whatever might be their success later.

"Taka him away!" ordered the padrone, briefly.

A loose brick in the wall was pulled out and it swung as if on a hinge. Inside the space was a small crosspiece of iron fitted into a ball, forming a handle such as is sometimes seen on doors in the oldest parts of New York.

Slippery Jim turned this crosspiece to the right with a faint click, and then pulled it. The result was that a door in the brickwork opened and a dark hall was revealed.

The detective was picked up by Swikey, Red and Slippery Jim, and carried into the hall, the door of which was closed behind them, leaving them in total darkness. The three men, without speaking, carried the helpless man along for several minutes. It seemed to him that a number of turns were made and several times doors were opened and then closed behind them, but whether there were any other persons to guard these doors, or whether his bearers opened them without other assistance, he could not tell.

Jack Bowles knew the purlieus of the big city very well, but this was a new experience for him.

"If I get out of this scrape alive, I'll hunt up this place and I think I may find the bottom to some mysteries that have puzzled me for years," he muttered, half aloud.

"Shut up!" hissed Slippery Jim, in his ear, in so threatening a tone that the detective, who, being brave, was also blessed with sense to know that discretion was sometimes the better part of

valor; he therefore obeyed without argument.

For ten minutes longer they carried him along in the darkness. Then they threw him on the ground with a force that shook him from head to heel, still in total darkness, and as helpless as a man tied hand and foot could be.

CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE FOR THE PADRONE.

Let us go back to Marcia, the young girl who was peremptorily sent to her room by the padrone before he went forth to try to get the settings of the Wickworth diamonds.

Marcia appeared to be submissive, and did not make any protest when sent away. But perhaps there were thoughts in her mind that would rather have surprised the padrone could he have divined them.

She had never known any home save the tenement in which she lived, nor any parent save the stern man who was feared by all the crooks in the city under the simple title of the padrone. Marcia's mother had died when she was a baby, and the padrone had often told the child what a handsome woman her mother had been, and how he had promised her that the child should be well cared for, and given all the education necessary to enable her to fill any position. It had been his pride to fulfill his promise, and so far the child had been carefully taught in all the common branches of learning and had, besides, been well coached in ordinary accomplishments.

Her one great gift was music, and the expensive piano provided for her by the padrone seemed to be absolutely at her command to produce the most exquisite harmonies, apparently without effort on her part.

When peremptorily sent to bed she obeyed with the quiet manner of one accustomed to such orders. She reached her room upstairs, opening the door with a patent key that hung, with two others, to a light gold chain around her neck, and locking it when inside.

The apartment was a large, airy place, being so high that it escaped most of the unpleasant odors of the street below, and giving a distant view of the Palisades in daylight and a mass of twinkling lights in the upper part of Broadway at night. The furniture was luxurious and in perfect taste. White and gold were the tones and they were blended in exquisite harmony in the pretty bedstead, the dresser, with its French plate mirror, and the wardrobe, with mirrors in which a full-length portrait of Marcia was shown as she turned on the electric light and glanced around her for a moment to be sure that she was alone.

The blue silk coverlet of the bed and the upholstery of the furniture of the same hue were in restful accord with the golden hair of the girl, and it is doubtful whether a prettier picture could have been found anywhere in New York than was afforded by the innocent young girl, so near to and yet so far from the vice and misery of the great city.

She sat in a light rocker looking out into the night in a dreamy reverie for perhaps five minutes. Then she started up with an exclamation.

"There is something going on!"

The sound of her voice struck her as if it belonged to some one else, and she walked to and fro across the room in a nervous manner that bespoke the turbulent nature of her thoughts.

"The padrone could not deceive me. There is some unusual wickedness afloat and I was sent out of the way so that I should not see too much. I know. It is not the first time and I suppose I should not trouble myself about it any more than I have on other nights when I have suspected I hardly knew what."

The young girl walked to and fro in an agitation that was pitiful, and none the less so because there was no outward reason for her to be disturbed.

"And yet, I never saw them dare to

attack the Splicer before. I must warn him! I must! I must!"

She seized a long dark cloak, a waterproof that hung in the wardrobe, and threw it over the handsome dress she wore, pulling the hood over her head so that it partly concealed her face. Thus arrayed she looked like many a girl that may be seen in the neighborhood of the Bowery on any night, and no one would be likely to interfere with her, even at this hour of the morning. She might have been noticed on Broadway or Fifth avenue, but here the appearance of women scuttling about the streets was nothing unusual, and would not attract even passing attention—provided she kept her face well covered.

"He said Cohen's! I heard him!" she muttered, as she locked her door outside.

Like a spirit she glided down the stairs and listened at the door of the room in which she had left the padrone and others.

"Not a sound!" she murmured. "They have all gone. Well, they shall not do as they please with the Splicer. I am only a girl, but I know that he is the best friend I have—except the padrone—and he shall not be entirely at their mercy. I must not hurt the padrone, though. He has always been good to me."

She shook her head sadly, and then, recovering herself with an effort, ran swiftly down the stairs and into the street.

The thoroughfare was dark and almost deserted. Occasionally she passed some slinking figure in the shadow, but no one spoke to her, and she did not fear the strangers. She was used to the neighborhood, and she knew that there was nothing to be feared so long as she kept straight on her way.

At last she reached the house in which Levi Cohen and Charlie Ling ostensibly carried on the laundry business. A light gleamed in the window of the lower room, shining faintly through the chinks of the closed shutters, but, as it was at some height from the street, she could not peep through, as she desired to do.

She listened intently; her quick ear caught the sound of voices in anger. Then the door at the head of the stone steps was burst open violently and down came Charlie Ling to the street, with the padrone's foot raised, showing what had caused the Chinaman to make his sudden flight.

Fortunately for Marcia, Charlie Ling was so disturbed over the unceremonious manner in which he had made his way to the street that he did not notice the muffled figure of the girl standing within a few feet of him. He picked up a stone in the road and made a motion as if he would hurl it at the door; but he changed his mind, threw the stone down and walked cautiously up the steps and into the house.

"What does this mean?" thought Marcia. "Is that only a sign of impatience on the part of the padrone over some little thing, or is something serious going on in there? I must find out."

Noiselessly she made her way up the steps and pushed open the door, which was not fastened. She found herself in a dark hall, impregnated with the stale odor of opium that is so noticeable in most of the houses in Chinatown, and that may, in fact, be distinguished even outside, in Mott, Doyer and Pell streets, which are the three principal thoroughfares containing the Chinese population of New York.

The door leading to the laundry was just inside the hall, on the left, and the girl pushed it cautiously.

"Fastened! I might have expected it!" she murmured.

She bent her head to listen, but, beyond a confused sound of several voices talking in low tones, she could not hear anything.

"Where are the Splicer, and Slippery Jim, and the padrone, and Levi, I wonder. They must be inside, and yet I cannot make out any of their voices dis-

tinctly. I feel sure I should know the Splicer's voice if it was in there, no matter how low he spoke. Oh, what does this mean?"

The girl placed her hand on the wall to steady herself, for the excitement and the horrible odor of opium together had made her feel faint, but she quickly withdrew her fingers from the slimy surface in disgust. Familiar as she was with the outside of these places, she had never been in a Chinese house at this end of Mott street before, and the filth was too much for her.

"It is for him that I am doing this."

This was her thought and it enabled her to bear the situation in which she found herself, and gave her courage to see her adventure to the end.

Again she stooped and tried to look through the keyhole, but it had been carefully covered, and she could see nothing.

She drew herself up almost in despair when the sharp crack of a pistol shot rang out inside the room, but seemingly below her at the same time, and there was a scuffling in the laundry, followed by a heavy fall.

She pushed against the door with all her force, but it was firm.

"I must get in! Some one is being killed, and if it isn't the Splicer, it must be the padrone!"

The scuffling continued inside, and the girl was nearly beside herself with anxiety and apprehension. She pressed against the door with all her might, but, as the door still stood firm, she listened again.

Everything was quiet. The scuffling had ceased, and the room might be empty for any sound that came from it.

"That is worse than the noise," she thought. "Before, I could follow what they were doing to some extent, but now, some one may be dead, for anything I can tell. Silence is always worse than sound in such a place as this."

In desperation, the girl pushed against the door once more, but without avail.

"I will get in," she whispered, determinedly. "I will get in!"

An idea had struck her, and she did not hesitate a moment to put it into execution. Thrusting her hand into her dress, she drew forth a small dagger, with a beautiful ivory handle encrusted with gems, among which could have been seen, had there been any light, several diamonds, each worth a small fortune.

The padrone had given it to her a week before. Not that she would be ever likely to want such a thing, he said, but it was just as well to have a weapon in case of an attempt to rob her on the street or elsewhere, for you never knew what might happen, particularly in New York.

She thought of these words now, with a sad smile, as she gently thrust the point of the knife into the crack between the door and the casing, and pushed back the bolt that held the door fast.

The door yielded at once, and she pressed it open slowly and cautiously, until she stood inside the room.

By the drop lamp in the middle of the ceiling, she saw that no one was present but herself.

Where was every one? They could not be far away, and she was familiar enough with secret doors and traps in her own home to be aware that something of the same kind would be sure to exist here.

With every sense on the alert, she stole across the room to the mantelpiece, on which there were Chinese ornaments and scrolls of paper with Indian ink characters on them.

There she took up her position, because it gave her a partial view behind the screen.

She could distinguish the end of the ironing table, on which she saw there were no irons or laundry work.

"That is strange!" she decided.

Her senses were strung up to such a pitch of keenness that she noticed matters that would have probably escaped her at any other time.

"That means something," was her unspoken reflection. "I am convinced the

key of this mystery will be found on that table."

Obviously the thing to do was to get at the table and see what was in it. Woman's curiosity would have been enough to make Marcia do this, but there was a stronger motive for it now, and she did not hesitate.

Quietly as a cat she made her way to the edge of the screen, and, stooping until her face was near the floor, she moved around until she stood close to the chintz covering of the table, just below the level of the top.

As she reached this position, she could hear voices, amid which she distinguished the deep bass of the padrone, the sharp accents of Slippery Jim, and the shrill speech of Charlie Ling.

"Where are they?" she murmured.

As she thus thought, the voices ceased all at once, as if they had gone into another room. It was at this moment that they conveyed the detective into the secret passage, and closed the door.

Summoning all her resolution, Marcia stood erect, and uttered an involuntary exclamation as she saw that there was no top to the ironing board, but an opening instead.

She was not so much surprised as if she had not seen secret doors at her own home all her life, but there was sufficient shock to her nerves in knowing that some dark deed was in progress in that gloomy cellar to make her place her hand involuntarily on her dagger and resolve to probe the mystery to the bottom.

She drew a chair to the side of the table, and, stepping upon it, determined to let herself down into the cellar, that she could see was only a few feet in depth.

One foot was already on the edge of the table, when, suddenly, a light gleamed forth from the darkness below, and before she could move, she found herself looking straight into the face of the padrone, who was gazing up at her with an expression of astonishment and anger that made her tremble in spite of herself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HONOR OF THIEVES.

The padrone was the first to speak.

"Whata does this mean, Marcia?"

He spoke peremptorily, savagely, and it was in this that he made a mistake. Marcia was wrought up to a determination to prevent a crime, if she could, and the tone adopted by the padrone only made her the more resolved to find out what was being done in this house.

The padrone repeated his question, in fiercer tone, and Marcia turned on him like a young tigress.

"It means, father, that I am not a child, and that I mean to know what you have been doing in that cellar, and where you have put the Splicer."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Red the Fox, and there was the sound of a blow, as the padrone turned upon the little pickpocket and hurled him across the cellar.

"You speak again, and I killa you!" he hissed.

"He, he!" tittered Charlie Ling, hiding behind Slippery Jim, for all the conspirators were in the cellar, although, standing in the darkness, they were not at once visible to Marcia.

The padrone turned wrathfully, and then, apparently considering that the small fry around him were not worthy of attention, he placed his hand on the edge of the trap, inside the table, and, with one spring, was by the side of the young girl.

Without another word, he seized her by the arm firmly, but not roughly, and led her from the house.

Marcia's first impulse was to resist, but she knew the padrone too well to do so as soon as she brought her natural common sense to bear on the matter. He would not be cruel to her, she knew, but she was equally sure that he would have his own way now, and that if she meant to help the detective she must choose some more propitious time. Moreover, she was not sure yet that the Splicer was in trouble.

The two reached the door of their own house at the other end of Mott street, and then Marcia asked:

"Where is he?"

"Who?"

"The Splicer."

"Go to beda! I attenda to all thata matter. It nota for little girila lika you to go outa at night. Don'ta you do thata again. You understand?"

Marcia was about to make some angry reply, but again her sense asserted itself, and she said nothing.

When they reached the room in which we first met the padrone, he closed the door, and turned on the electric light.

"Sita down, Marcia."

She took a seat in an easy chair by the side of the padrone's desk. It was her usual place when they were alone.

The padrone opened his desk, took off his street coat, and donned his gay-colored smoking-jacket and silk cap.

It was then, when he felt himself comfortable for indoors, that he turned toward Marcia, and looked at her long and steadily. She met his gaze unflinchingly, her clear blue eyes looking straight into his dark ones.

"Marcia," he began, "have I nota always been kind to you?"

"Yes."

"Have I ever madea you feela that you could nota trusta me?"

This time Marcia did not answer yes, and he repeated his question.

"Did you trust me to-night?" she asked, simply.

"I havea to do things that you do nota understand."

"I understand that you are not acting fairly by the Splicer, and I am sure that you are running yourself into great danger by doing it."

"Maladetto! Thinka you I nota know my business, leetle girl?"

A cloud swept across his swarthy brow, and it was evident that Marcia was the only person in the world who could thus speak to him without feeling the force of his anger.

"I do not know, padrone. If I had not been afraid that something was going on that you would regret later, I should not have gone down to Cohen's."

The padrone arose and walked up and down the room two or three times before he replied:

"Marcia, you nota know me yet."

"Yes—yes I do," interrupted Marcia, hastily, placing her hand caressingly on his sleeve as he seated himself at his desk again. "Are you not my father?"

"I am the only father you ever had," he muttered. Then, in loud, decided tones, he went on: "To think that my little girl would spy on me—me, Raphael Martini. I am sorra. Go to beda, child. Go to beda."

He opened the door for her, and she went, obediently; he kissed her on the forehead, and said, softly:

"Go to sleepa, and sleepa long. It is nearly morning, and this life is nota fit for you. Go to sleepa, my leetle girl."

As she went upstairs he watched her, and then listened till he heard her room door close before he went inside to his own room, and threw himself into his chair, in deep thought.

"So, my leetle Marcia," he muttered. "You nota satisfied witha my way of doing things, eh? Wella, she getting a big girila now, and I mighta expecta eet. I musta givea up thisa life, and settle downa somewhere with my leetle girila. Yes; I willa puta this one job through, and then I leavea New York for ever. Yes, yes; I musta do that. I love leetle Marcia, and musta takea care of her, what ever happens."

A knock at the door, and the padrone stepped quickly across the room and reconnoitered through the little peep-hole already described. The inspection was satisfactory, for he opened the door at once, and Slippery Jim strode into the room.

"Wherea the others?" asked the padrone, as he looked down the staircase.

"Shut the door!" was all that Slippery Jim replied.

The padrone closed and locked the door, and then looked quietly at the other as he resumed his seat in front of the desk.

"See here, padrone," exclaimed Jim, savagely, as he thumped his fist upon the top of the desk. "This thing has gone far enough."

"Whata you meana, eh?" asked the padrone, coolly, not at all disturbed by the other's violence.

Slippery Jim was evidently taken aback by the calmness with which the padrone met his bluster, but he would not give in. So he scowled threateningly as he replied:

"I mean that I have that cussed Hezekiah Dodds, or Splicer, whichever you like to call him, in the crib at Cohen's, and that some one has the diamonds."

"Who? You?"

"No, durn it! You know I haven't got them!" spluttered Slippery Jim, becoming almost incoherent in his passion, in marked contrast to the calmness of the padrone.

The padrone took a cigarette from a silver box that lay on his desk, lighted it carefully with a wax match, puffed at it two or three times to make sure that it was properly alight, and then blew a mouthful of smoke into Slippery Jim's red and angry face.

Jim's eyes blazed with wrath, and he made a slight movement as if he would spring at the Italian's throat. But he did not spring.

What it was that restrained the slippery crook could not have been told, perhaps, for the padrone did not move a muscle save to keep on puffing steadily at his cigarette, with his eyes fixed on those of his companion.

"Curse it! Why don't you say something?" growled Jim.

The padrone smiled, and went on smoking.

Slippery Jim fell back into the easy chair lately occupied by Marcia, with an expression that said, plainly enough: "He is too much for me."

The padrone read the expression as plainly as if Jim had spoken, and, putting down his cigarette, he arose, and deliberately struck the young man a stinging slap on the cheek.

Jim cowered like a whipped dog, and the padrone took up his cigarette again, rolled it daintily in his fingers, and remarked, pleasantly: "Jim, don't try to bulla me. It won'ta do."

The other made no reply. He was evidently afraid to speak.

"You meanta to say that I hada the diamon', didn't you?" went on the padrone. "Wella, if I havea, it none of your beesinees. You do as you are tolda, and I takea care of the rest."

Slippery Jim found his tongue at last to ask: "What shall I do?"

The padrone took a paper from his pocketbook, and examined it closely, holding it up to the electric light, and looking at it from all sides.

"I tella you, Jim, I havea nota gota the diamon', and I don'ta know where they are, but I believea thata this paper havea something to do with eet."

He handed the paper to Jim, and leaned back in his chair, puffing at his cigarette.

The paper was that taken from the detective, and the holes punched through it were the only marks that could be found upon it.

"I cannot make anything of this," said Jim, at last, as he laid the paper on the desk in front of the padrone.

That provoking smile played again about the mouth of the padrone, as he said, calmly: "Of course you makea nothing of this. But, maladetto! I see whata eet is. I havea seena papers like this before."

"You have?" exclaimed Jim, eagerly.

"What does it mean?"

"Sit down, and I tella you."

The padrone looked at the door, and at every part of the room ere he answered: "It is the key to a secret writing, and we musta finda the other paper before we can reada eet."

"The other paper?"

"Yes; eet takea two to make a letter. You understanda?"

"No; I do not," declared Jim, emphatically.

The padrone shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course you don't. I did not think you would. Go to beda, anda when you wakea up, we finda something more about eet."

"But—"

"Go to beda," commanded the padrone. "You makea me sicka to look at you."

The crook pulled out the book in the bookcase that opened the secret door and disappeared. Then the padrone turned sharply in his chair, to make sure that the bookcase secret door was closed, and indulged in a quiet laugh.

"What fools I havea to deala with! They thinka they can makea me do anything I nota wanta to do. Even the Splicer makea mistake this timea. He a smarta man, but I havea him now, and the Wickworth diamon' will be mine—mina. Ha, ha!"

He laughed aloud as he said this, and rolled himself another cigarette, finding that his silver box contained no more ready-made.

As he puffed away he resumed his meditations, and pleased himself with looking at the mysterious perforated paper meanwhile.

"Thisa paper! H'm! Yes. I understanda! I understanda! I have seen the same thing before. Eet is the key to the Wickworth diamon', and perhaps to mucha more. Ha, ha! Signor Hezekiah Dodds, you havea nota such a holda on the padrone as you thinka!"

The padrone was enjoying his cigarette keenly, to all appearances, and he did not seem to be as much disturbed about the loss of the diamonds as might have been expected.

"Yes, the key to the diamon'! Ha, ha!"

He went to the outer door of the room, and then examined the bookcase door.

"Alla safe! I thinka I will look at the leetle beauties. The key to the Wickworth diamon'! Ha, ha!"

It seemed to give him a particular pleasure to repeat these words, and he smiled as he spoke them, as if he were enjoying some exquisite joke, although there was nothing humorous in them, so far as an ordinary listener could have discerned.

"I nota know!" he muttered. "Perhaps I better nota look at them now. I musta be cautious."

Again he looked furtively about the room, and then, as if suddenly making up his mind to do something, whatever might be the risk, he thrust his hand deep into his trousers pocket and brought up a chamols leather bag, in which there were some hard, irregular substances, that could be felt through the bag.

Intensely absorbed in his occupation, the padrone untied the mouth of the bag, and poured out upon his desk a handful of sparkling something, that might have been taken for pieces of glass if their brilliancy had not proven beyond all question that they were something very much more valuable.

They were the Wickworth diamonds!

The padrone's black eyes sparkled as much as the stones as he gazed at them in perfect ecstasy.

"Oh, they are granda—they are lovely! Whata woulda I nota give for them. And they are minea—minea—all minea!"

The padrone rubbed his hands in his delight, as he felt that this was indeed the supreme moment of his existence.

And yet he was never nearer to death than at that instant!

Leaning over him, with a long knife upraised, while his strong, sharp features were distorted with cupidity, was Levi Cohen, in his Chinaman's dress, while behind him, looking eagerly over his shoulder at the gems, was the scowling countenance of Slippery Jim.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FLOORER.

When the detective found himself alone, lying helpless on the damp ground in the underground cellar, he realized that he was in as bad a fix as he had ever got

into in the whole course of his adventurous life.

"Gosh all spruce-gum!" he exclaimed aloud, in the rural vernacular to which he had accustomed himself in his character of the Illinois farmer. "Ef ever I thought those fellers could get ahead of old Hezekiah Dodds that way. They hev' me trussed up heer like a chicken ready for roasting, and unless I kin make my way out in some sort of shape, and right smart, too, I'm thinking that Hezekiah Dodds, the farmer, and Jack Bowles, the Splicer, will disappear from this world forever, simultaneously."

He strained every nerve as he concluded this soliloquy, in trying to loosen the ropes that bound him, but soon desisted, as he realized that the cords had been put on by an experienced man, who understood the importance of tying such knots as would become tighter the more they were pulled.

Slippery Jim, Red the Fox, and Swipey had done their work well, and the detective smiled grimly as he felt that he had a task before him that would test his right to the cognomen of "Splicer," as perhaps it had never been tried before. He did not doubt that he could get out of these bonds if he were given time to work on them, but that was the question—would he be allowed the time?

"To think of those fellers getting away with the diamonds after all," he muttered. "That's what riles me. But, the padrone is the man that hez them, and I'll make him sick before I'm through with him, as sure as my name is Bowles—or Hezekiah Dodds—whichever he likes."

The detective rather enjoyed calling himself by one or other name at random, and if he had been asked seriously whether his real name was Jack Bowles or Hezekiah Dodds, he could hardly have answered without a moment's reflection.

"They took that paper from me, too. Confound their inquisitiveness! Well, it will not be of any use to them, unless they get the other end of it, and that is safe enough, at present. I could get that perforated sheet replaced, if necessary, but it would be a good deal of trouble, and I guess I'll make them give up the original as soon as I get out of this. Little Marcia does not know that these Wickworth diamonds are so closely associated with her own fortunes, and if the padrone knew it maybe he would not have got himself into this scrape for the sake of them. Well, well! It's a funny world, and people are always opposing their own interests without knowing it."

This philosophical reverie had not been the detective's only occupation for the last few minutes. While he muttered to himself in a disjointed way, he was moving himself as much as possible in his bonds without pulling the knots any tighter.

His hands were tied behind him in such a position that neither could reach the other. They were back to back, and fixed so that he could not use his fingers in any way to release the other hand.

"They think they hev me, I guess," he muttered, as he found that, by careful movement, he was just able to touch the back of his right wrist with the forefinger of his left hand. "We shall see."

The reaching of his wrist with his forefinger, although he was able to only just touch it, was an advantage that the detective appreciated. He knew that he was getting toward the point when he might be able to throw off his cords altogether, and his only anxiety was that he might be left alone long enough to accomplish his task.

He realized that he must be somewhere near the Bowery, and that most likely there was an exit from his prison in that direction, as well as by way of the laundry on Mott street.

"Once let me get the use of my limbs, and I'll soon find out whether there is any other outlet."

Then he set himself seriously to work at getting out of his bonds. A few deft turns of his wrists as far as the ropes would let

them go, and he found that he could get the forefinger of his left hand inside the cord that bound his right wrist.

"So far, good!" he muttered, pausing to rest, for the strain was great, and had thrown him into a profuse perspiration. "I don't think Slippery Jim was quite as clever as he thought when he tied me up here, well as he did it."

To work again, and his sensitive forefinger touched the place where a tight knot held the cord around his wrist. The knot was pulled so hard that it felt almost like a knob of iron, and the detective whistled involuntarily.

"Whew! This will test you, Hezekiah Dodds, if you were never tried before! But, I'll do it—I'll do it, just to show them thar city chaps that they can't bunco an Illinois farmer!"

He laughed at his own conceit, and, after listening carefully to make sure that he was alone, and vainly trying to penetrate the inky darkness, he went to work in earnest.

It was not an easy thing to pick a knot with one finger, but the "Splicer" was an expert in knots, and in five minutes he had released his right wrist. The taking off of the cords around his left hand and his ankles was the work of a moment, for he simply produced a keen pocket-knife from some part of his clothing that had escaped the prying attention of Red the Fox and Swipey, and cut the rope with two hasty slashes.

"I thought they would not be able to keep me tied up very long," he soliloquized. "Although they did the work very well, and if I were not gifted with unusual smartness as to knots, they might have found me here when they came back in pretty bad shape."

His first use of his liberty was to go all around the room in which he was confined, with two objects. One was to find out its size, and another to make sure that he was alone.

His examination established both those facts. No one was in the room with him, and the space of the place was about ten feet square. It was stuffy as well as dark, although in one corner he could feel a slight draught, as if there were an opening somewhere.

He found the door by which he had entered thickly studded with iron bolts, and so firm that he could not shake it in the least, although he tried to do so, with the object of finding out what chance there might be of forcing it open.

"Couldn't get out that way, I expect, even if I wanted ter," he muttered. "Wal, ther old man'll hev ter try something else. Gosh all hemlock!"

He felt carefully all around the rough brick wall, with its chunks of mortar protruding between the courses, and, scratching his hands in one or two places as he pursued his investigations. He went all around until he found himself at the original door again, and then he whistled softly, as he discovered that there was only the one door.

"Seems ter me that they've come as far with me as they could after all. This wall is solid all the way around, 'cept at this side we come in at. Wal, I'll hev ter go out the way I come in, I reckon."

But he was not quite satisfied. He wanted to find out what that draught of cold air on the other side meant, and he had some sort of suspicion that there must be a way out over there, if he could only find it by himself.

He made his way over to that spot, and climbing up by means of the rough bricks and mortar, he was enabled to thrust his hand into an opening about two feet long and six inches wide. A noticeable current of cool air was perceptible as he put his hand into the opening, and he could hear the noise of the elevated trains and the jingle of grip-car bells, which told him that the Bowery could not be far away.

"Just fer ventilation, I suppose," he muttered. "But I can't exactly understand it. It isn't the style of these fellers to leave a hole in this way jist fer the sake of fresh air, 'specially in a secret crib of this kind. No; it means some-

thing more than that, Hezekiah Dodds, and you must find out what it is."

In the course of a long experience as a detective, Hezekiah Dodds, as he liked to call himself, had met with so many queer things that he was prepared to discover hidden meanings in apparently unimportant circumstances which would have escaped the average man.

So it was that this little opening in the wall, with its current of air and its reverberation of the sounds of the Bowery, gave him plenty to think about, and set his determination to find out whether the hole was of greater import than it professed.

The first thing was to overcome the darkness, which was so black and thick that he had been compelled to trust entirely to his sense of feeling in finding his way about.

"It's a queer fact that the sharpest crook has a streak of foolishness in him that makes him overlook some point that his cunning and natural shrewdness with a strong mixture of brassy cussedness, would tell him is dangerous to him. Those fellers might hev been sure that I had some place to keep my little private matters, and that when they turned out my pockets, to find they were empty, they could perhaps have found something if they had searched far enough. By gosh, I sometimes think there isn't much credit in running down the gang, they are so dead easy."

As the detective thus cogitated, he produced from somewhere about himself a small round tin box, in which he pressed a spring with a sharp click. The result was that a tiny flame shot up from the top of the tin box, and there was light enough to illuminate a few feet on every side.

"Good! I don't know what I'd do without my little joker, nohow," averred the detective with a chuckle, as he stroked his gray whiskers to make sure that they were firmly fixed to his chin. "Better than a bull's-eye, because it takes up such a small space and gives all the light I want, without the smell of oil and all the bother of trimming the wick that you find in the old-fashioned lanterns."

Hezekiah knew that he was in a ticklish situation, and that he might never leave the cellar alive, but his disposition to philosophize could not be overcome, and he would have discoursed on the merits of his little lamp if he had been looking straight into the muzzle of a Winchester rifle.

The knife that he had used to cut the cords on his ankles and right wrist was held in his right hand, ready for emergencies, and he smiled grimly as he thought of how neatly he had fooled the rascals in their attempt to rob him of all his personal possessions.

He examined the hole in the wall carefully, holding his lantern to the place, and noting that the flame bent in a certain direction, so that he could tell exactly from which quarter came the wind.

"Now, nothing kin persuade me that this here hole is just for ventilation," he observed thoughtfully. "It means more than that, I am dead sure."

As he spoke, he thrust the point of his knife into the mortar around the opening, trying to find some hollow or soft spot. He had jabbed the point into the mortar under the hole half a dozen times, without any result save perhaps to dull the edge of his knife, when he was suddenly gratified by the instrument sinking to the hilt into the wall, evidently meeting with no resistance after passing through the thin crust on the exterior!

To draw forth the knife and thrust it in again was the work of an instant, and he began furiously sticking it in all over the surface, beneath the slit, and trying to solve the problem of the material of which the wall was composed.

"This here mortar and brick is only a bluff, I'll bet a drove of hogs," he exclaimed, aloud; "an' I'll bet I'll git clear through if no one interferes."

He gave a particularly vicious dig at the wall as he thus expressed himself,

and then pulled hard, as he found that his knife would not come out.

As he had half expected, there was a large section of the wall loosened at this movement, and an opening was made about four feet high and two feet wide, agreeing to the space of the opening that he had found originally.

"Guess I hev nothin' to stay here fer," was his philosophical remark, as he blew out the flame of his little lamp, and, knife in hand, crawled through the opening.

He went through feet first, because he did not know what might be on the other side, and he did not care to run the risk of plunging to the floor on his head. As it was, he could not tell much about where he was going, and would have preferred going through bodily, in a heap, had it been possible.

"It's all dark, anyhow," he reflected, "so it would not do me much good to go face first, so far as seeing is concerned. But, somehow, it is ag'in human natur' to enter an enemy's country backward, and I'll feel better when I— Hel-lo! What in thunderation is thet?"

This last portion of his remarks was caused by his finding himself pulled violently by the heels, so that his chin dropped with unpleasant force on the edge of the hole, scraping and bruising it considerably.

"Let go, you durned varmint! Let go my heels, or I'll skin yer alive, so I will!" he cried, now thoroughly aroused, and using his former dialect with a vigor that testified to his indignation.

He swung himself around, at the same time pulling one of his legs loose, and delivering a blow with his foot into some soft substance, that he judged to be some one's stomach, since a loud and agonized groan accompanied the kick. Then he got his other foot free, and, having thoroughly lost his temper (an unusual thing with him, by the way), he shot out his right fist with a determination to punch somebody that would assuredly have caused damage had there been any one within range.

As it was, he only thrashed the empty air, and became madder and madder.

"You consarned cuss, I will lick yer, if it takes me all night!" he howled, as he plunged forward into the darkness, with his two arms working like windmills.

Nothing met his attack, however, and in a minute or so he had cooled down, and realized that he was making a fool of himself, and behaving altogether in a manner unworthy of a detective who had been chasing crooks for many years with remarkable success.

"I ought ter hev' knowed better, an' ef I wasn't a jay, I would!"

Lecturing himself in this manner, the detective felt in his pocket for the tin box containing his lamp, when his feet were knocked from under him, and as he dropped upon the ground he received a violent blow on the head that partly stunned him. His ideas became confused, but, in spite of this, he could plainly hear, although apparently a long way off, the squeaky tones of Charlie Ling:

"Allee samee great detective, but not quite smartee enough. Sabe?"

CHAPTER IX.

IS HE DEAD?

"Te-he!" laughed Charlie Ling. "Me fixee him allee samee alonee! He, he, he! Splicee he think he comee over me, but not be. No! Me smartee, too!"

The Chinaman was standing in a doorway through which a stream of light fell upon the apparently unconscious figure of the detective, who lay where he had fallen when he had been thrown down and struck upon the head.

It was a narrow room, with earth floor, like the rest of the place, and the apartment with the light also had an earthen floor, but was unlike the room in which the detective lay in that it was furnished with three bunks, one above the other, in front of which hung chintz curtains of gaudy pattern, but questionable cleanness.

Whether the detective saw this or not Charlie could not determine, but, as he,

gave Hezekiah a good hearty kick, without obtaining the slightest recognition of the operation, in the shape of a groan or cry, he made up his mind that Hezekiah knew nothing about his surroundings.

"Me knockee him out, allee samee," he squeaked, triumphantly. Then, raising his voice, he called:

"Swipee!"

"Wot's the bloomin' row?" inquired a sulky, sleepy voice from the other room.

"Comee and see, Swipee!" returned the Chinaman, giving the detective another kick.

Swipee, grumbling a good deal, tumbled out of the lowest of the three berths and shuffled forward. He had taken off his coat and vest and shoes, and had evidently been sound asleep.

"Wot's the trouble? Blow me if a feller can git any sleep around this shop, at all."

"Lookee!" was Charlie Ling's response, as he pointed to the form of the detective.

Swipee was wide awake on the instant. "Wot? He got out of the bloomin' crib, did he? I say, Charlie, he's a bird, ain't he?"

"You mean he fly away, allee samee, eh?"

"Shut yer guff! You're a bloomin' idiot!" answered Swipee, scornfully. "How did he get out?"

Charlie pointed to the opening in the wall, upon which the light of the lamp in the room threw a strong glare.

"In course! That's wot I allers said. That there wall hain't no use at all. That's one of Cohen's precious smart ideas, an' it don't work. Any one could find out that there wall was bogus, an' not half try!"

"Not half try?" repeated the Chinaman. "Me think he try hard allee lightee, and he gottee there, too. Te-he!"

"Stow that!" growled Swipee. "What gits me is how did he git the ropes off himself."

"He birdee! He fly outee them," suggested Charlie Ling.

Swipee looked at the Chinaman with unutterable disgust, and bent over the detective to see whether he was really senseless.

He picked up one of Hezekiah's hands, and saw that the cords had made deep marks around the wrist.

"He was tied pretty tight, but I was allers afraid that there warn't no ropes as could hold the Splicer when he didn't want 'em too."

Swipee sighed as he made this confession, and then turned fiercely on Charlie Ling.

"What the dickens are yer standin' there, lookin' at me for, as if you was one of your own bloomin' idols? Don't yer see we hev to git this feller into the other room, and make him safe afore Cohen finds out we let him go?"

"Allee lightee!" answered Charlie Ling, cheerfully.

"Allee lightee be blowed!" exclaimed Swipee. "Cohen will just naturally kill you, and me, too, if he finds out that we didn't watch this rooster closer. Don't you know that it will be a ten-year stretch at Sing Sing if he ever gets away from us?"

"For you! Not for me! Me allee lightee!" laughed the Chinaman, as he picked up the detective's head and allowed it to fall heavily.

"You yaller jackanapes! Take 'old of 'is 'eels, will yer?"

Thus speaking, Swipee lifted the detective by the back of the neck in no gentle manner, and, hardly waiting for the Chinaman to seize his heels, dragged him to the other room.

"We won't trust to no string this time. We'll fix him with something better."

As he spoke, Swipee brought a pair of handcuffs from a corner of the room, and fastened one to the right wrist of the detective.

"That's a pretty ornament. Fits him as if it wos made for 'im," observed Swipee. "Now for the other one."

But here Swipee found that his inten-

tions were balked by the unexpected stiffness of Hezekiah's left arm. Try as he might, the crook could not move it so as to bring the two wrists of the detective near to each other. It was impossible to fasten the handcuffs upon him unless his hands were brought within reach of each other.

"Here's a bloomin' go," exclaimed Swipecy, desperately. "I can't get these things on him, and I daren't let him stay here unless he's fixed in some way."

Again he attempted to put the loose handcuff on the detective's left wrist, but without avail. He threw himself into a chair by the side of Hezekiah, and looked at him with extreme disfavor, which culminated in another hearty kick for the detective.

"He's a mean cuss!"

"Vellee! But I thought you fixee him!"

The Chinaman grinned maliciously as he spoke, but he took care to keep out of the reach of the chagrined Swipecy.

"I'll tell you wot we'll have ter do, Charlie!"

"Yes."

"Are you sleepy?"

"Not vellee."

"That's lucky, 'cause you'll just have ter sit here and watch him while I take a snooze. I can't take him, and I can't leave him, and we can't put him in the crib he was in afore, now that he's broken the wall down. So the only thing we can do is to keep him here till Levi comes back."

"Allee lightee!"

"You understand?" growled Swipecy, as he threw himself into his bunk, and composed himself to sleep.

"Swipecy!"

"Well?"

"What am I to do?"

"Watch him, don't I tell yer?"

"But if he wakee up?"

"Send him ter sleep ag'in."

"How?"

"Charlie?"

"Yes."

"You're a bloomin' fool!"

Swipecy closed his eyes, and while Charlie Ling still brooded over his companion's last uncomplimentary remark, the sound of rumbling snores from the lower bunk told that Swipecy was fast asleep.

The detective lay like a log at Charlie Ling's feet, and was evidently still unconscious from the effect of the blow dealt him in the dark by the Chinaman.

"Supposee he die?" thought Charlie Ling, with some apprehension, as visions of the electrocution chair forced themselves upon his mind.

The reflection that if the detective were to die now he, Charlie Ling, might be tried for murder, agitated him so that he felt compelled to awaken Swipecy and learn what he had to say about it.

"Swipecy!"

Swipecy snored louder.

Charlie Ling waited a few moments, and then repeated:

"Swipecy!" accompanying his call with a punch in the sleeper's ribs.

The response was rather disconcerting to the Chinaman, for Swipecy started up in his bunk, and gave Charlie Ling a thump in his chest that sent him spinning across the room, until he tumbled headlong over the prostrate form of the detective.

"Yer yaller skunk! What yer doin'?" demanded Swipecy, savagely.

"Nothing, Swipecy," returned the Chinaman, humbly.

"Nothin'? D'yer call it nothin' to dig yer great claws inter my side when I'm asleep? Burn my brains, if I ain't a bloomin' good mind ter break yer in two!"

The Chinaman was too much interested in the probable disposition of himself in case Hezekiah Dodds never recovered to care much for Swipecy's threats.

He waited until the crook had exhausted his passion in abuse, and then, as he fell back upon his pillow and closed his eyes, Charlie Ling broke forth:

"Swipecy!"

Swipecy opened his eyes and looked

hastily about him for a boot or some other convenient missile that he could hurl at his disturber's head.

Charlie Ling looked quite as quickly, and saw that he was safe unless Swipecy arose from his bunk, so he went on:

"I wantee to know what we do if the Splicee killed."

"Shut up!" was the only reply vouchsafed by Swipecy, who was so fatigued that he felt as if he would rather be hanged in his sleep than be compelled to wake up to run away.

"Well, Swipecy, what shall I do if Splicee wakes up?"

"Knock him down," grunted Swipecy.

"Knockee him down? Allee lightee!"

"And don't speak ter me ag'in till I wake, or I'll belt yer bloomin' 'ead off."

With this last injunction, Swipecy went fast asleep once more, and although the Chinaman ventured to call "Swipecy!" two or three times, he elicited no response.

"Swipecy say killee him, if he wakee! If he not wakee, I can't killee him. Well, I waitee to see what he do. But I gettee ready to knock him down if he wakee, anyhow," and picking up a heavy smoothing-iron from the floor, Charlie placed it conveniently upon the stool on which he had been sitting. This done, he reached into one of the upper berths, and dragged out a lot of blankets and two pillows, which he arranged on the floor into a comfortable bed.

"Me wantee little sleepee, too. I lay here, eyes open, ready to go to sleepee when Levi comes, but I keepee awake till he does come."

Thinking thus, and giving his thoughts words, unconsciously, Charlie Ling looked into the top bunk, and, in a spirit of sheer mischief, gave the occupant a hearty punch in the ribs, and immediately bobbed down to the floor.

There was a yell from the sleeper, who started up and looked out from between the chintz curtains, revealing the features of Red the Fox.

"That's that cussed Chinaman, I'll bet a drink!" growled Red.

He could not see Charlie Ling at first, for that youth was stretched upon his improvised couch close to the bunk, and was not in sight until Red leaned far out.

"If I wasn't too tired ter git out of bed, I'd kill yer," grumbled the ruffian crook.

He looked at the Chinaman for a few moments, but there was not a ripple on the serene countenance of the Celestial, and Red lay back and went to sleep.

Charlie got up, gazed a moment at Red, moved as if he would stir him up again, changed his mind, looked again at the detective, and then lay on the floor, blinking at Hezekiah, and wondering what would be the outcome of the adventure.

CHAPTER X.

SLIMY PETE CATCHES A TARTAR.

Charlie Ling was very sleepy, and no wonder. It was near daylight, and although accustomed to take a snooze at any time during the day when the humor seized him, he had not availed himself of the rest the day before, and was therefore pretty well exhausted.

He caught himself just dropping off, once, and resolutely shook off his drowsiness, at thought of what Levi Cohen might say in case of the escape of the detective.

"He muchee kickee me, if Splicee gettee away," he murmured, as he got upon his feet and rubbed his eyes.

He bent over Hezekiah, to find out why he was so quiet. He placed his hand over the heart of the prisoner, and finding it beating vigorously, he was satisfied that the detective was not dead.

The Celestial was not learned enough in physiology to be aware that the healthy beating of the heart could not continue while the subject was unconscious, or he might have tried to find the secret of the anomaly. As it was, he was perfectly satisfied that he was not a murderer, and hence was in no immediate danger of the electrocution chair.

So he lay down again, and, with a firm

determination to keep awake, went fast asleep!

For five minutes the regular breathing of the three rogues was the only sound in the room. The detective lay, with his eyes nearly closed, just as he had ever since being brought in and thrown upon the floor.

It seemed that it was quite safe for Charlie Ling and his companions to be asleep, for their prisoner had made no sign.

But—what is this?

Gently and almost imperceptibly the right eye of Hezekiah opened a little wider, and a slight movement of the head could have been discerned, had there been any one awake to watch.

For two or three minutes longer there was no further evidence of life on the part of the detective. Then he sprang into action, as if he had been galvanized. He softly arose and stood erect, active, wide-awake, and a match for the whole crowd in the room, with all their companions outside, as well!

"What fools these crooks are!" he mused, with a smile, as he looked contemptuously toward the bunks. "They take more chances than any honest business man would think possible. They know me, and yet they let me lie on the floor in their custody, without even fixing my hands."

From one of the secret pockets that the thieves had been unable to locate, Hezekiah took a small key and unlocked the handcuff on his wrist.

"A pretty good pair of darbies. Guess they were stolen, so I'll jist annex them. I haven't a pair with me, and I might want them before I'm through with this job."

He put the handcuffs into his outer coat-pocket, and then deliberately opened the door and looked at the place through which he had broken through the wall.

"Guess there is some way toward the Bowery, but I don't want to follow it. I'll go out the way I came in."

He stepped to a door at the other end of the room, and saw that it led to a passage-way, lighted by a coal-oil lamp stuck in a bracket on the wall, about half-way down, and that there was a door at the other end, which might place him in the cellar below the laundry on Mott street.

Glancing carelessly at the Chinaman and his two companions, and seeing that all were in a sound sleep, he went through the doorway and closed the door.

As he had expected, he found himself in the cellar where the work of melting stolen jewelry was carried on. The brazier, cold and with a solid lump of hard metal in the crucible, was still there, and when he lighted his little pocket lamp and looked about him, he saw that the cellar had probably not been used since he was in it.

He listened intently, but nothing could be heard above him. The probability was that every one in the house was asleep. He searched through his clothes again, and brought out a watch, which he consulted by the light of his lamp.

"Half-past four, eh? It seems as if I had been in this place a week. What a lot of incident can be crowded into a few hours!"

He uttered this piece of philosophy seriously, and there was no sign of the Hezekiah Dodds dialect in his speech. He had a way of being one person or another at will, and this was hardly the sort of thing the practical old farmer would utter.

"I must get some sleep, sure. I have a good idea where the Wickworth diamonds are now, and I think I have decided that Marcia is the girl I am looking for in connection with the case."

With these enigmatical words, the detective pulled a stool into the middle of the cellar, and, mounting it, pushed open the trap that covered the hole above.

The trap yielded easily, and he saw that there was still a light in the laundry, although no sounds proceeded from it.

"The question is, where is Levi? The

old rascal never leaves his place unless there is something important in the wind. And I don't want to run into him just now. I must have him just where I can handle him when I do meet him."

Taking his big knife from his pocket and opening it, he put it into his mouth, and, agile as a cat, drew himself through the trap-door, and crouched down inside the ironing table. Through a tiny rent in the chintz he could look into the room. It was entirely empty, unless some one were hiding behind the screen, which was not likely.

"Well, here goes!" and the daring fellow leaped over the chintz-covered side of the table, and dropped upon the floor noiselessly. Immediately stepping around the screen, one swift glance assured him that he was alone.

"All the birds of prey have flown, eh? Well, now I know just where to put my hands on them."

He went to the front doors, opened them one by one, and passed out to the street, the morning air blowing comparatively fresh even in that terrible quarter, where filth of all kinds is ever to be found, and where it seems as if Nature herself became befouled from her ugly surroundings.

The detective stepped across the street, in front of the undertaker's, and scrutinized the house he had just left. Who lived in the upper stories he neither knew nor cared. They had a separate existence from Levi Cohen, and it mattered not what they might be so long as they were not wanted by the police.

What puzzled the detective slightly was whether Levi Cohen was in the house or not. If he were not, then there would be no difficulty in finding him, but if he were still in the building, he must have hidden himself in some part unknown to the detective, and there might be more mischief brewing.

"Can't find out anything by looking at the house. Guess I'll make inquiries elsewhere."

He turned down Pell street, to the Bowery, and walked up the main thoroughfare for two blocks, until he met the policeman on post. Acting under strict instructions, the officer took not the slightest notice of the detective until Hezekiah stopped him. Then he saluted.

"Wilson, hev yer seen Levi Cohen to-night?"

"Which one, sir? The Chatham street fence?"

"No. Mott the Chinaman."

"Yes, sir. Saw him going up Mott street over an hour ago, with Slippery Jim. They were—"

"That will do, Wilson," interrupted the detective, shutting him off. "Anything moving on your beat to-night?"

"Two drunks, and a hurry ambulance call for a rube who'd taken knock-out drops in Mickey Donovan's dive around the corner."

"All right. Good-night, Wilson!"

"An', say, p'leeceman," added Hezekiah, in his character of a farmer, with a very natural bucolic drawl, "yeou don't think ez you kin tell me where Noah Bolton lives, kin yer?"

The officer took his cue immediately, as he saw a man with a soft hat pulled over his brows passing hurriedly, but evidently listening to the conversation.

"Git out of this, you old jay! I don't know where no Noah Bolton lives. You get to your home, if you have one, and mind the cable cars—see?"

The gruff tones of the policeman, and the indignation of the jay, as he sputtered something, and made his way rapidly up the Bowery, appeared to amuse the stranger, and he followed the farmer with much interest.

Hezekiah knew that the stranger was following him, and so quickened his pace that the other was breathless by the time they had walked as far as Mulberry street, up Houston.

The detective was chuckling to himself, as he heard the stranger puffing like a grampus; then he turned suddenly, and asked his follower what he wanted.

"Don't want nawthin'," was the sullen

reply, "'cept a drink and money for a snooze. I'm dead broke, see? You look like a good-hearted man, an' I reckon you'll help a poor feller, won't yer?"

"By the hokey, in course I will! How much will fix yer?"

From one of his hidden pockets the detective produced a roll of bills, and held them so that the stranger could see them.

As he had anticipated, the stranger snatched at the roll of bills, and, as the stranger evidently had not anticipated, Hezekiah Dodd's right fist shot out, and stretched the thief at his feet.

The next moment a whistle had brought a policeman to the spot, and the discomfited footpad found himself in the grasp of the law.

"Take him in, Graff," ordered the detective, shortly, "and I'll appear against him this afternoon. You know him, don't you?"

The policeman looked at the low-browed prisoner, and shook his head.

"Well, I know him," observed the detective. "He's Slimy Pete, of Chicago, general crook, sandbagger, and thug. Specialty, highway hold-ups."

The thief shivered and his eyes bulged as he heard his record read off in this business-like way by the farmer, without a trace of country dialect, and as the policeman hauled him away he muttered, in the excess of his discomfiture:

"Worst give-away in all my life! This means a trip up the river for me three years long."

As we shall not meet Slimy Pete again, it may be said now that he was not disappointed in his expectation of going to Sing Sing for three years. That was exactly his sentence, and he is serving his time at the penitentiary now, under one of his numerous aliases.

This little casual adventure put the detective in the best of humors, and he made his way to his hotel on Broadway, not far from Houston street, with the feeling that he had earned the rest he intended to enjoy.

"Call me at five o'clock this evening—not a minute before, no matter who comes," he said to the clerk, who knew him well, and was used to his ways. "I have had a hard night of it, and I think I am entitled to twelve hours' sleep."

"Very well, Mr. Bowles," answered the clerk, putting down the call on his book.

"And how many times must I tell yer my name is Hezekiah Dodds, and that I'm from Illinois, gol darn yer?" broke in the detective. "Ain't yer got no sense?"

"I beg your pardon! We are alone, and I did not think it mattered," returned the clerk, humbly.

"It allers matters, yer durned old rail-fence! Good-night!"

The detective took his key and went upstairs to his room, where he was in bed and sound asleep inside of ten minutes, no more disturbed by the fact that he had been in imminent danger of death two or three times during the night than any merchant would be over the worries and annoyances of his business that are a daily occurrence.

"Strange man, that," thought the clerk, in the office. "But he is as slick as they make them, and I guess he's right never to let his disguise drop. You can't tell who might be listening. And he does make a good jay farmer, sure enough!"

And Charlie Ling, Red the Fox, and Swipecy were still snoring in the underground bedroom in the Mott street house, utterly unconscious of the way they had been fooled by Hezekiah, the Illinois farmer!

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT FOR THE SWAG.

We left the padrone examining the Wickworth diamonds, in his own room, with two men looking over his shoulder who had murder in their eyes.

The padrone let the glistening stones fall through his fingers in a cascade of brilliancy, while the expression of his countenance became more rapturous every moment.

Levi Cohen and Slippery Jim hardly breathed in their intense interest in the

situation, while the Jew continued to admire the treasure the padrone held, and which had come into his possession in a mysterious way that could not be understood by the two men behind him.

For all they knew, the detective had contrived to hide the gems in the cellar at the laundry, and here was the artful Italian hugging them to his bosom, and doubtless laughing over the way he had fooled his partners in crime.

At last the padrone began to replace the diamonds slowly and reluctantly in the chamois leather bag, weighing each stone in his hand as he did so, and muttering indistinct words of pleasure over them.

When all the stones were in the bag he tied it up carefully, and then held it up between his thumb and forefinger, as if to enjoy the sight of the whole treasure in one glance.

"Maladetto! Buta they are beautiful—granda!" he exclaimed.

He shook his head as if he could not bear the thought of so much wealth without making some movement, and was just about to place the bag in the folds of his big blue smoking-jacket, elaborately trimmed with gold and vari-colored silks, when something happened.

With a mingled cry of rage and cupidity, the two men behind had sprung upon him and seized the bag at the same moment.

Like a flash the padrone saw through the situation, and without saying a word he turned and attacked his assailants.

Levi and Slippery Jim each held the bag, and were trying to tear it away one from the other, when the padrone also obtained a grip on the prize, and the three men fell upon the floor in a struggling heap.

"Let go, padrone, or I'll kill you!"

Levi fairly howled these words, as he pulled with all his might at the bag, and forced his elbow into the chest of Slippery Jim.

"Quit your hold, Slider!" he commanded, "or I'll choke the life out of you!"

"Quit your own hold!" was Jim's defiant response. "The stones are mine!"

"Yours? You blackguard! You mean crooka! Maladetto! Where is my knife?"

He caught sight of the Israelite's knife that had fallen from his hand and lay just out of the reach of any of the infuriated men. The Italian loosened his hold on the bag for a moment, and reached for the knife—an unwise movement for him, for the others took advantage of it immediately.

By the time the padrone had clutched the knife, Jim Slider and Cohen had the bag between them, and had disappeared through the bookcase door, closing it with a bang!

The padrone flew at the bookcase, but, in his haste, he fumbled at the secret fastening, and when he threw it open the other room was empty.

He ran to a certain corner of the room, and, stamping with his heel on the head of a nail in the flooring, a trap opened at his side, and he jumped down the hole, with a stifled execration as the trap-door slid noiselessly back into its place.

For a minute all was quiet; then the trap-door opened again, and the head of the Italian appeared, accompanied by a string of maledictions in English, Italian and French that made a picturesque conglomeration.

"Sacre! Cusses! Maladetto!"

The face of the man was distorted with rage.

"Very wella, Jim Slida! I hanga you! You havea the diamon', but I havea you!"

Turning off the electric light, he went through the bookcase door again into the outer room, where he threw himself into his chair to think over the situation.

But even cupidity is not proof against the weaknesses of nature. The master of crooks revolved all sorts of schemes for getting even with the two men who had, as he considered, robbed him of the diamonds, and his brain worked with painful activity for perhaps five minutes.

Then, as he paused in his reflections to wonder whether Marcia was safe in her room, following it up with the conjecture

as to whether Hezekiah Dodds was enjoying his imprisonment in the cellar at the Chinese laundry, he caught himself nodding.

This made him indignant with himself, and he became very wide-awake, and muttered savagely that he would dispose of Slippery Jim before he was a day older.

Then he nodded again, woke up, and nodded until his forehead fell upon his desk.

"Maladetto! I musta nota sleep till I finda the diamon!" he growled, as he dropped forward again, and this time did not arise.

He could not help himself. He was too sleepy to carry on the battle any longer, and slept as sound as a rock, with his head on his desk, while the morning sunlight tried to force its way between the chinks of the tightly-closed shutters, and the sounds of busy New York came to the room in faint murmurs that rose and fell like waves.

Half an hour later he roused himself with an effort, cold and stiff, and wandered over to the lounge, without troubling himself to open his eyes. There he stretched himself, and not a sound save his breathing came from him till well into the afternoon.

A loud bang on the door, unlike the usual light tap that was recognized as the sign of friends outside.

The padrone did not hear it!

Another bang, and another!

"Maladetto! Whata that?" growled the sleeper, stirring uneasily.

More bangs, in a perfect artillery of noise, was the answer.

The padrone jumped to his feet and ran to the door, but did not open it.

He stood and listened.

Bang! bang! bang! Biff! Crash! Bang, bang!

Carefully he removed the slide that held the small eye-hole, and peeped through.

Then, with an oath, he threw open the door, and, seizing Charlie Ling by his pigtail, dragged him into the room, swung him around, and gave him a hearty kick.

"You yellow skunka! Whata you meana? I killa you!"

"Ow!" squeaked Charlie. "Me notee do anyting! Me allee lightee!"

The padrone gave him a shake that made his teeth rattle, and scowled at him in a way that the Chinaman rightly interpreted to be a question as to what all this noise and excitement meant.

"Oh, Mistee Padronee! He gonee! Allee gonee!"

"Who?"

The Chinaman wrung his hands, and looked at the fierce Italian in a perfect agony of fear.

"You answer me, ata once, or I smasha your face! You understanda that?"

"Yes; me understandee!"

"Wella, whata is eet?"

"He's gonee! The Splicee's gonee!"

"Gonee? Nota gota away?"

The Chinaman nodded, for he was too frightened to speak.

"Anda you letta him go?"

The padrone hissed these words slowly, and with a significance that made the Chinaman's flesh crawl.

The crook-master pointed to a chair, and Charlie Ling sat down, wondering what would happen next.

The padrone disappeared into a small closet in a corner of the room, and the splashing of water proclaimed that he was performing his ablutions. He came out, wiping his face on a towel, and looking at Charlie Ling threateningly whenever his eyes were not covered.

"Me could notee helpee it!" wailed the Celestial, when he felt that he could not bear the vengeful glare another instant.

The padrone did not answer, but went on with his toilet, combing his shaggy hair and whiskers, and looking at the Chinaman all the time, as if uncertain whether to hang him, cut his throat, or blow his brains out.

"Mistee Padronee!"

No answer. The padrone put on his coat and big black hat, and seized his loaded cane. Then he motioned to the

Chinaman to go to the door, following him closely and keeping Charlie Ling in mortal terror of an assault from behind.

But the padrone did not touch him. He opened the door, after the Chinaman had fumbled at the lock so nervously that he could not move it, and pointed down the stairs.

"Go to Cohen's, quicka. I follow you!"

The Chinaman did not wait for anything more, but scuttled down the stairs and into the street without looking back to see whether the padrone was following him or not.

The padrone went upstairs and knocked at the door of Marcia's room. The young girl opened it, and looked quickly at her father as if to see whether there was to be any more scolding on account of her adventure of last night.

Somewhat to her surprise, the padrone patted her gently on the cheek, and said, mildly:

"Marcia, my flower, come down stairs. I want to talk to you over breakfast."

"Very well, padrone."

A shade passed over his face altogether different from that which had frightened Charlie Ling so much. This was not anger, but pain.

"Call me father to-day," he said, quietly.

Marcia threw her arms around his neck as she answered, impulsively and tenderly:

"I will call you father always. Are you not the only father I have ever known, and do you not love me?"

"Santa Maria! I do! I do!"

There was an agony in the tones of this strange man as he said this, and, turning quickly, he went down to his own room and seated himself at his desk, with his broad, flapping black hat still upon his head, shading his keen, dark eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO IS HER FATHER?

For ten minutes he sat alone, and then the door opened and Marcia came in. She went up to the padrone, and, taking his hat from his head, stroked his hair gently.

"Marcia, I must explain something to you, something thata has been on my minda a long time."

Marcia looked at him quickly as she murmured:

"Are you telling me now on account of what happened last night?"

The padrone nodded.

"Well, then, have breakfast first. Then I will listen to you. I suppose it will keep till then. Won't it?" she added, lightly.

"Yes; it willa keep," he said, quietly.

She busied herself in preparing breakfast, for which all the materials were at hand in the room, and in ten minutes they were seated opposite each other at the table. The padrone drank his coffee and ate his breakfast bacon mechanically, and was evidently unaware of the nature of the viands that the girl had prepared in so appetizing a way.

Marcia, with the healthy enjoyment of food that is natural to the young, in spite of trouble, disposed of her breakfast easily, and without apparent perturbation.

It was just as she cleared away the last vestiges of the meal that the padrone, lighting a cigarette, looked full in her face and said:

"Marcia, you are nota my own daughter."

"I have always understood that," she returned, quietly.

"But you nota know that you are the child of a rich man, who lives in Chicago, and who is now trying to geta you away from me. Oh, Marcia, my leetle girl, the old padronea will nota have you mucha longer, and he wanta to see you happy."

There were tears in the eyes of the Italian, and Marcia went to him, and pulled his face down against her shoulder. The movement seemed to bring him to himself, and there was the old determination to be seen in his face, as he went on:

"But I nota give you up justa now—no, nota now!"

"Who wants you to give me up, father?"

"Bowles, the Splicer; he here to taka you away!"

"The Splicer?"

"Yes. Hezekiah Dodds, the man who havea alla the crooks in the country in his gripa. The man who cannot be kepta even when he is tied hand and foota and put in a cellar, with two mena watching him. Thata the mana. Whata can I do? He too mucha for me! He too mucha for me!"

The padrone puffed fiercely at his cigarette, and remained silent, while the girl watched him closely and waited for him to speak.

"Yes, Marcia, he geta out, whena we thoughta him all safe, and now he coma to me, and I go to jaila."

"Father!"

The girl started as the padrone made this gloomy prediction, and looked at him with an expression in which pity for him and interest in the detective were blended—or, at least, so it seemed to the padrone.

"Yes, he takea you away!" repeated the Italian, as he threw the remains of his cigarette into the fireplace, and rolled and lighted another.

"But I thought he was in New York only to try to get the Wickworth diamonds?" said Marcia. "Isn't that his mission here?"

"Yesa, thata is true. But do you know who is the owner of the diamonds?"

"No."

"Wella, it is—"

The padrone broke off suddenly, and muttered: "No, no. I musta nota tell her now."

He put on his hat again, and, without another word, went to the door and opened it.

"Stop, padrone! You are under arrest!"

Clear and sharp came the words in the well-known tones of the detective, and the Italian started back as if he had seen an apparition, while Hezekiah Dodds, stroking his whiskers, stood regarding him with an air of amusement that would have been unbearable to the Italian at ordinary times.

Now, however, the master of crooks simply gazed at the detective, stupefied and silent.

"Go inside, padrone!" commanded Hezekiah, and the other obeyed.

Hezekiah closed the door of the room and nodded pleasantly to Marcia, who looked from one to the other, as if she could not understand the situation—and probably she couldn't.

"Now, padrone," began Hezekiah, "you know me."

"No, I nota know you! Santa Maria! You are a wonder!"

"So I have been told," returned the detective, with a grim smile. "But that is neither here nor there. You took the Wickworth diamonds. You are the last man that had possession of them, so far as I know, and it will be a case of fifteen years for you if you do not produce them right now!"

"Maladetto! I have nota gota them!"

"Oh, yes, you hev, gol darn it! Don't lie, old hoss!" said the detective, pleasantly, dropping into his former dialect easily and naturally, according to his habit.

"I sweara I have nota gota them!" declared the other, so earnestly that Hezekiah gave him a sharper glance from his dark eyes, and was evidently disposed to believe him.

"I saw you grab 'em when you thought you had the dead wood on me in that gol darned cellar," said Hezekiah.

"You saw me? How dida you see me?"

"Padrone, if I wuz to tell you how I do everything, you would know ez much ez I, and that wouldn't do, don't yer see. But, by the hokey, I did see yer. sure ez you're born, an' I want them diamonds."

"Levi Cohen and Slippera Jima havea them."

There was no doubt that the padrone was speaking the truth, and the detective did not contradict him. He simply remarked:

"Wal, I got to hev them thar stones, an' I guess I'll clap you in jail ontill I want yer as a witness."

To the consternation of Marcia, and somewhat to the astonishment of the detective, who was not easily astonished, the Italian threw himself at the farmer's feet, and clasping his rough, homespun trouser, beseeched him not to send him to jail.

"Let me stay and helpa you to finda the diamon', but don'ta send me to jaila. Maladetto! Only leta me geta even with thata Slippera Jim and Cohen, and I do anything you wanta—even to giving upa to you my leetle Marcia."

"How do you know I want your Marcia?" asked the detective, turning upon him sharply.

"Oh, I knowa—I knowa! She nota my childa. She know thata! And she knowa that you can tella her who is her father!"

"Father!" cried Marcia, as she looked bewildered from one to the other of the two men.

"That's right, padrone! Stir things up, ez if there warn't enough trouble 'ithout you makin' a break like this here. Now she knows the fact, I'll tell her somethin' more, that she can't be restored to her father until the Wickworth diamonds are safe in his hands. He hez a sort o' superstition that there can't be no happiness for him or his daughter until the diamonds are safe in his hands."

"I knowa—I seea!" muttered the Italian. "I thoughta it was something likea thata!"

"Now, padrone, I'd like ter give yer a chance, but you'll hev ter give me a square deal, and not try no more of that goldarned monkey business, or I'll pinch yer, sure. You onderstand?"

The padrone had arisen to his feet, and was standing humbly before the detective, waiting to hear his fate. Marcia could hardly believe that this was the stern man who made all the rascals that came to his room tremble at his frown, and hang with such deep respect upon his every word.

"Splicia, you cana depend upona me," he murmured.

"You will help me to git them there diamonds, and not try no dirt, eh?"

"Yes."

"Good! Then I'll trust yer."

"Thanka you!"

"You know what will happen if you ain't square?"

"Yes."

"Then it's a bargain."

"But, what about me?" asked Marcia, who had been listening to the colloquy, and wondering more and more whether the secret of her birth was really to be revealed at last.

"Marcia, you stay at home, and be a good little girl, and it will all come right. If the padrone hadn't a spoken so quicky, you would not hev been troubled about this thing now. Ez it is, I'll only say that you will soon know all about it, ez soon ez them pesky diamonds are found."

The girl was about to say something more, but Hezekiah, with a light laugh, took her by the hand, led her to the piano, and whispered:

"Play that little thing I heard yer doing the other day, won't yer, an' mebbe I'll tell yer something more."

There was a certain air of command about this quaint man that was possibly hypnotic power. Whatever it was, it was never resisted by those upon whom he chose to exercise it, and now Marcia turned to her pile of sheet music and drew forth a Beethoven sonata that she recognized as the music that had caught the fancy of the detective the night before.

Her fingers swept over the keys in a sweet minor, and the detective nodded in acquiescence.

"That's it, my dear. Play it all through."

Hezekiah dropped into a chair behind her, and the padrone was in his own place at his desk.

The girl looked at them, and then, throwing her soul into her music, according to her custom, she forgot everything but her piano.

She played the sonata, and then, with nothing but her memory to guide her,

wandered off into a dreamy air, that carried her completely away from her immediate surroundings.

For a full hour she played on, never looking behind her to see what effect it had upon her auditors, until, at last, a loud knock at the door startled her, and she jumped up, only to find that she was alone in the room.

When her father and the detective had left the room she had not the slightest idea.

The knocking at the door continued, and, mystified and worried almost beyond endurance, she threw it open, and admitted Slippery Jim.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE GAMBLING HOUSE.

As soon as Slippery Jim was inside the room, he shut the door, and looked eagerly around.

"Who's here?" he demanded, hoarsely, and the girl could see that he had been drinking.

"I am here," she answered defiantly, for she was as fearless as the crook-master in her way, although but a young girl.

Jim did not make any response, but, opening the door, whistled softly.

In a moment Red the Fox and Swipecy sidled into the apartment, and closed the door softly.

"What does this mean?" demanded Marcia.

Jim did not reply, but, addressing his companions, he said:

"It's all right. That was the padrone and the Splicer we saw below, and we can go on with the plant."

"It's a blooming dangerous thing," grumbled Swipecy. "I don't want to git meself shut up in no mounchy old prison for ten year."

"You'll be thrown out of window in about a minute if you don't shut up," returned Jim, savagely.

"Why don't yer shet yer tater trap when the captain tells yer?" put in Red the Fox.

"And I don't want any talk from you, either," snapped Slippery Jim. "When I require your assistance in correcting any one, I'll let you know. Get to work."

This reproach of Red the Fox pleased Swipecy so much that he was obliged to give it vent in a chuckle like a cork flying from a pop-bottle, and Slippery Jim turned on him with a frown so fierce that both Swipecy and Red were afraid to say anything, but stood waiting for the next command.

"Take her!" growled Slippery Jim.

Before Marcia had the least idea of their intentions she found herself struggling in a black shawl that Swipecy had carried bundled up under his arm, and that she had not noticed, while, at the same moment, strong hands held her arms to her side, and rendered her helpless.

Then she lost consciousness. When she recovered she felt that she was being carried along in a vehicle of some kind, while the heavy breathing of Swipecy and an occasional growl from the other side told her that she was in the hands of desperadoes.

She tried to speak, but a handkerchief had been fastened over her mouth, and she was unable to utter a word.

The carriage was dark as pitch, it seemed to her, but as she began to realize her surroundings, she found that her head was still enveloped in the black shawl, which was fastened down in some way, but loosely enough to enable her to breathe.

For an hour she was carried along in the carriage, although it seemed to her like a day or two, and then it stopped.

She was lifted in somebody's arms, and carried some distance. She heard doors open and close, and then, as the shawl was loosened, distinguished a very strong odor of cheese.

Off went the shawl, and as her eyes became accustomed to the stream of sunlight that poured upon her, she saw that she was in a goodly-sized room, neatly furnished, and that Slippery Jim was sitting opposite, regarding her intently.

Swipecy and Red the Fox were not there.

For a few moments she was too dazed to speak, but in that time she was able to notice that the walls of the room were rather strangely decorated.

Playing cards covered every inch of the walls and ceiling. They had been tacked up without any regard to order or regularity, and had evidently been tacked up just as they happened to come. Court cards and the ordinary spot cards were all there, and there must have been hundreds of packs used to complete the work.

A long table ran down one side of the room, on which the black oilskin cover, marked with figures and signs, told that the devotees of faro were well provided for here. Several small tables, with shelves below, for the convenience of placing beer and whisky glasses, and a roulette wheel uncovered in a corner, revealed, even to this girl, who had been kept carefully from a close knowledge of such things by the padrone, that this was a gambling room, and she could easily picture scenes of violence often taking place here at an hour when decent people were supposed to be fast asleep in their homes.

The odor of cheese, which became particularly strong when Jim stepped to the door and opened it to listen for a moment, rather puzzled her, until she heard the lumbering of a heavy wagon in the street below, and looking out, saw that it was loaded with cheeses and other edibles in bulk.

"We are on West street, aren't we?" she asked, her anxiety overcoming her repugnance to speak to Jim Slider.

"Yes," he answered shortly, "over a wholesale butter, egg and cheese warehouse."

The sound of a footstep outside made him go to the door, and an elderly woman, with a red face and gray hair, and neatly dressed in a gown of light silk that fitted her buxom figure to perfection, came into the room.

"Well, deary, so you came to see me, did you? That was good of you."

"Why, Mrs. Simpson, is this your house?" exclaimed Marcia, jumping up in delighted surprise. "I never knew where you lived. Is this your restaurant? You'll let me go home, I know. This fellow," looking at Slippery Jim with a scorn that might have withered him if he had not been proof to the influence of a girl's dislike, "has brought me here for some purpose of his own—I suppose to cause my poor father trouble—and might murder me, for anything I know, if I had not found a friend. Oh, I am so glad you are here."

Slippery Jim smiled sneeringly. "You made a mistake this time, Mr. Slider," continued the girl. "You did not know that Mrs. Simpson was a warm friend of the padrone's and mine." "I didn't know it," grunted Slippery Jim. "What good do you think it will do you?"

"Good? Why, I shall be able to go right home. That is the good I mean."

"Oh, will you? I am very pleased to hear it, I am sure. And I am much obliged to Mrs. Simpson for her good intentions," returned Jim, with strained politeness.

Marcia looked at the old woman, and something in her look made the girl tremble, in spite of herself.

"Mrs. Simpson, you will take me home, won't you?" she asked, with trembling eagerness.

Mrs. Simpson did not care to look into the clear, innocent eyes of the girl, and she stepped to the window and looked out, as she answered, over her shoulder: "Certainly, deary; you shall go home."

"Of course, deary," repeated Slippery Jim, mockingly.

"But not just now," added the woman. "You must stay and have some dinner. Your father, the padrone, will be here after a while to take you, and then you can go."

Before Marcia could reply the old woman and Slider had left the room, and the girl heard a bolt shot into place outside.

She rushed to the door, and pulled. She was a prisoner.

"What can this mean?" she thought. "Hezekiah said that the secret of my birth and the Wickworth diamonds are connected, and that until the gems are found I cannot be told who I really am. I am convinced that this outrage on me has something to do with it."

She looked out of the window, and tried to open it, but it was fastened down.

She could see the men hauling freight out of the warehouse below, and their voices came up to her indistinctly, as they grumbled and swore over their work, after the custom of their kind.

Should she call to them for help to get out of this place? For a moment she was inclined to break out a pane of glass, and call attention to herself by the crash. But second thoughts convinced her that this would do her no good. Before she could explain, Mrs. Simpson or Slippery Jim would be there, and they would put a different face on the facts, and make her appear to be in the wrong, or as some unruly girl who did not know her own mind.

Moreover, she felt that the presence of the men down there was something to depend upon in case her circumstances became desperate.

On the whole, she would wait for a little while and see what was to happen.

"They won't kill me, I am sure, and I do not think Mrs. Simpson would allow me to be hurt. No; they want to keep me out of the way, just to frighten my father, and be revenged on him for holding them so much in subjection. That is the explanation. I will wait."

This reading of the mystery did not satisfy the girl altogether, but she had seen so many adventures in the course of her life with the padrone, and had noticed that the proceeding to extremes was very seldom resorted to, save in the most desperate circumstances, that she had little fear for herself.

She consulted the tiny gold watch she wore, and saw that it was nearly six o'clock, and as she turned to the window to look out, she saw that the men below were preparing to leave the place for the night.

For a moment she was inclined to obey her former impulse and crash out a pane of glass, for she did not like the idea of these presumably honest fellows going away, particularly as it was beginning to grow dusk, and would soon be silent and dark in the neighborhood.

The lower thoroughfares of New York city are proverbially quiet and deserted at night, and the streets whereon the great warehouses of provisions are almost the only kind of business are quieter than any of them.

She watched the men depart, and as it rapidly became dark, a street gas lamp cast a sickly gleam across the dirty street, and shone upon a heap of mud and refuse that was piled up immediately in front of the house.

Now she became very lonely, and something akin to fear took possession of her as the darkness crawled into the room, and no one came near her.

There was an electric button between the windows, and she pressed it, to see what the result would be.

Her finger was yet on the knob, when there was a scuffling outside the door, which a moment later was banged open, and a figure that she could not distinguish clearly came skipping toward her.

"Allee samee here we are! Whatee you wantee? Te-he!"

"Charlie Ling!" she exclaimed.

"Te-he! Yes, me Charlie Lingee! Allee samee waiter here. Me t'inkee you nice little gel. Te-he!"

He was bowing and scraping so that his pigtail swung backward and forward as if it were bewitched, while his loose flapping jacket raised quite a breeze.

"What are you doing here?" asked Marcia, who suspected more trouble from seeing the Chinaman away from his customary haunts on Mott street and in a

business that she had never heard of his attempting before—that of a waiter.

"Why me here? Oh, me tellee you. Me here because—because—"

He was evidently at a loss what lie to tell, and Marcia saw through his embarrassment at once, and turned away in disgust. She did not care to listen to a falsehood, and she saw that he would not tell the truth.

Charlie Ling may have had another lie ready to his tongue, but he never got an opportunity to tell it, for just as he made a very deep bow to Marcia, somebody gave him a kick that sent him on his face in the middle of the carpet.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLIE LING AND THE PIANO.

"You yellow cockroach!" exclaimed the angry voice of Slippery Jim, as he seized Charlie Ling's pigtail, and banged his head on the floor.

"Me gittee, right away."

Charlie Ling jumped to his feet, and was about to make his exit, but his ill-luck caused him to turn and bestow an admiring glance upon Marcia.

"You allee samee nice gel!"

"Biff!" and Jim had bestowed a slap on the Chinaman's ear that made him see fireworks.

"You infernal bedbug!"

"Whatee?" screamed the Chinaman, dancing about, partly in a rage, and partly in fear of Slippery Jim's powerful hand. "You callee me a cockroach and a bedeebug. Me no bedeebug, allee samee! Me good Chinese boy!"

"I'll send you where good Chinese boys ought to go, if you don't make yourself scarce," growled Slippery Jim. "You rat-tailed spider!"

The Chinaman seemed to be overcome by Slippery Jim's fertility in inventing new terms of opprobrium, and picked up a cuspidor, as if he would hurl it at his tormentor's head.

Like a flash, Jim Slider had the Chinaman by the throat, and would, perhaps, have choked him to death but that Swipey suddenly appeared and whispered something in his ear.

"Git out! And don't try any more monkey business, or I'll wring your neck!" hissed Slippery Jim, as he dexterously swung the Chinaman out of the room.

Charlie Ling had been sent with such force to the landing outside the door, that he could not stop himself, and the jumble of sounds, with the squeaking cries of terror of the poor wretch, proclaimed that he was tumbling down the stairs.

"Do him good! He's too lively, anyhow," remarked Jim, with a smile. Then, to Swipey, he continued: "He's down there, is he?"

"Just come in."

"Ask to see me?"

"Yes."

"What did you tell him?"

"That you were somewhere about the crib, but I didn't know just where."

"Don't let him know the girl is here. Understand?"

"Do you think I'm a bloomin' fool?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. Disposed to think you are," returned Slippery Jim, carelessly.

"I think I am, ter take so much of your cheek," said Swipey, sullenly.

"Don't talk so much with your mouth, Swipey, if you value your health, but go down and tell Cohen I'll be with him in a moment."

"All right."

"Cohen!" murmured Marcia, involuntarily. "Is he here?"

Slippery Jim's hearing was almost preternaturally sharp, and he caught Marcia's exclamation, although it was delivered almost below her breath.

"Never you mind who is here, or is not here," he said, fiercely. "I'll take care of you, and if you behave yourself, you will go back to your father safe and sound. If you don't, why, there's too much against me already to make me hesitate about putting a girl out of the way forever if it becomes necessary."

"That's the talk," observed Swipey, admiringly.

"Who told you to speak? Go down and obey orders. And, here!"

Swipey stopped.

"Order me a steak and tea down there. It's my supper time."

"All right."

"And, here!"

Swipey stopped again.

"See that a good supper is sent up to this young lady."

"All right."

And this time Swipey went down, and left Jim alone with Marcia.

"What does this mean?" demanded the girl, who was become desperate, as she thought of how worried the padrone, and probably the detective, would be, when they found that she had disappeared and did not return at night.

She had a few girl friends up town—schoolmates, with whom she had kept up an acquaintance, but who had no idea of the character of the padrone and the other connections of Marcia. She sometimes visited these girls and stayed till evening. But she always made it a point to be home early—soon after supper, at the latest.

"Father will think I have gone up town, and probably is not worrying about me yet. But he will, after a while, and how do I know what is to become of me?"

Then she thought of the detective and became reassured at once.

"He will find me, if I am alive, and probably he knows all about this place and will seek me here. Yes, I can trust to the Splicer, of course."

"What do you say?" asked Slippery Jim, as he saw the girl's lips moving, and conjectured the nature of her reflections.

"I say that I want to know what you mean by dragging me here from my home. You know the padrone, and you know that he would crush a dozen such miserable insects as you for the sake of his daughter."

"Of course I do; and I know that he will see that his daughter is always rich and comfortable. So I mean to be rich and comfortable, too, my pretty little Marcia."

Marcia was young, but she was not too young to understand Slippery Jim's meaning.

"Why, you don't mean to say—"

"Yes, I do, Marcia. I mean to say that you are to be my wife. I shall marry you because I like you, and because I am tired of working at my profession, and I want to live without having to hustle. That's the whole situation."

"You talk nonsense."

"Do I? We shall see."

"The padrone will find me, wherever I am, and you know what he can and will do with you. There will be nothing for you but the penitentiary, because he will never stop hunting you till he runs you down, if you do any harm to me."

"I shall not do any harm to you. I shall marry you, in good style, with a reception and all the rest of it, and the padrone will be at the wedding, and give you away, like any other good-natured father."

The girl laughed contemptuously.

"Yes; you may laugh, my dear, but you will see that I am right in what I say. The padrone will consent to the wedding."

"Go away from me. At least, let me be alone, if you will not let me go."

"Why, I am not treating you unkindly, am I? You have the best room in the house, and all the works of art about it. We call it the art gallery."

"Will you leave me alone?"

Slippery Jim ignored the remark, and went on:

"This is the room that the guests of the house like to use, but I will try to keep them out to-night. See that piano over there?"

Marcia could not restrain a quick movement toward the upright piano that she had not noticed before, because it stood in a rather dark corner, while Jim smiled knowingly.

Marcia tried to open the lid of the piano, but it was firmly fastened.

"Wait a minute," and Jim turned on the incandescent lights that hung over the center of the room in a large bunch, as the jingling of dishes and teaspoons announced the presence of Charlie Ling, who was carrying up a neatly arranged meal on a clean white cloth on a tray, with china and glass glistening, while the fragrant odor of coffee overcame even the strong smell of cheese that seemed to flavor everything.

"Put it down on the table," commanded Jim.

"Allee lightee!"

The Chinaman, who seemed to have recovered entirely from his unlucky fall down the stairs, and to be as lively and cheerful as ever, bustled about, and soon had the table nicely arranged, with a chair drawn up, and everything inviting.

"What a nicee gel!" he squeaked.

Slippery Jim frowned, and the Chinaman skipped to the other side of the table.

"Supper allee leady," he said, smirking at Marcia across the table. "Me stay and waittee on you, eh? You nicee gel!"

Slippery Jim made a jump for the Chinaman, but Charlie Ling was on the watch, and kept out of his way.

"You nicee gel!" he repeated, with another smirk at Marcia, and enjoying beyond all telling the rage into which he was throwing Slippery Jim.

Slippery Jim clenched his fists, and then, as the Chinaman again skipped near Marcia and pressed his hand to his heart, as if overcome with admiration for the girl, he threw his hat at Charlie Ling, and caught him full in the face.

The hat was a stiff Derby, and the Chinaman, being utterly unprepared for it, he fell backward upon the floor, full-length, while Jim smiled grimly.

"Give me that hat!" commanded Jim.

The Chinaman picked up the hat, and saw with pleasure that there was a huge dent in it. Looking straight into Slippery's face, Charlie Ling gave the hat a vicious kick with his knee, and flattened it out completely. Then he held up the dilapidated article to Jim with an expression of sorrow and contrition that only a Chinaman could assume.

Marcia had turned to watch the performance of the Celestial and was smiling, in spite of herself. But now, interested in the piano, she was again tugging at the lid, without avail.

"Open that piano, Ling!" commanded Jim.

"Allee lightee! Me open it!"

The Chinaman skimmed over to the piano, and tugged at the lid, but could not move it.

"It lockee," he said, looking closely at the lid.

"No, it isn't. Pull!"

Charlie Ling screwed up his lips, and seizing the lid with both hands, put all his strength into a final yank.

"Comee up!" he yelled.

This time there was some result from the tugging. The lid flew up, and at the same time the whole front of the piano fell forward, and Charlie Ling found himself flat upon the floor, with a turn-up bedstead all over him.

The piano was not a piano, but an ingeniously contrived bedstead that hid its real purpose in the guise of a handsome Steinway all day.

Charlie Ling kicked and struggled, but could not get out.

His feet, in their thick felt shoes, described eccentric movements in the air, and the muffled cries from somewhere in the midst of the wire springs, slats and bedclothes, told that the Chinaman was still alive, but half smothered.

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Marcia, forgetting for the time her own troubles in sympathy for the Chinaman.

"Ow! Ow!" squealed Charlie Ling. "Lettee me out! Ow! Slipperee Jimmee! Lettee me outee!"

Jim Slider stepped forward and with one pull drew the bedstead from the struggling form of the Chinaman, so that he could crawl out.

Charlie Ling felt himself all over, and then, satisfied that all his bones were

safe and sound, allowed his yellow face to expand into a smile, as he slowly ejaculated:

"What a jokee!"

Slippery Jim was still holding his flattened hat in his hand, and, as Ling saw it, the smile grew broader, and he added:

"Thatee was a big jokee, too!"

The crook aimed a blow at the Chinaman's head, but Charlie Ling was on the watch for it, and he skipped over the bedstead and was halfway downstairs before his assailant knew that he was gone.

Jim restored the bedstead to its place, and made the piano a piano again. Then he pointed to the meal arranged upon the table, and bowing ceremoniously to the girl, left her, locking the door after him.

CHAPTER XV.

PISTOL VS. KNIFE.

When Slippery Jim went down stairs, leaving Marcia to herself, he walked straight to the basement, below the level of the street.

The odor of cheese was very strong upstairs, but when he reached the basement it was not noticeable.

The entire floor level with the street was devoted to the warehousing of provisions, and the occupants of the other part of the building had no connection with it.

The staircase was shut off from the warehouse, and there was a separate entrance from the street, so that the house was practically two houses, although under one roof.

There were white curtains to the windows upstairs, and shutters to the broad window in the area, with its iron grating. No one could look into the rooms belonging to the windows from the street, and if any stranger had troubled himself to wonder what the place was, he would probably have contented himself with the supposition that it was the home of some old-fashioned family that preferred the lower part of the city to the modern accommodations several miles above, where most New Yorkers go after business hours in these days.

The policeman on the beat could have told the stranger that it was not a private house, but was one of those select restaurants that are really clubs, to which only the "right" people are welcome.

The policeman may have known that the guests were not always people of irreproachable character, but that thieves and bunco men were fond of resorting there, and that many a good "job" had been put up in that innocent looking house—a job that would fill the newspapers on the day after its consummation, and set the public to wondering how it was possible to rob that bank or mercantile establishment without detection in these days of careful police protection.

But if the policeman on the beat knew all this, he did not tell any one. It was before Dr. Parkhurst and the Lexow Committee had disturbed the old order of things, and the police were still reaping their profits from the shady side of city life.

The hall in the basement was a dark place, and Slippery Jim, well as he knew the way, was obliged to grope along, with his hands against the wall, till he found the door.

He turned the handle and walked in just as the policeman on the beat stepped to the head of the stairs from the street and looked down, carelessly—probably with the idea of getting a cup of coffee, or something stronger, according to his evening custom.

Simpson's restaurant was wide open, and there was no reason to be secretive about anything that was done there, as Mrs. Simpson would have told you, with a bland smile, had you asked her.

Jim found himself in a large, comfortable room, with rather low ceiling, but lighted brilliantly by electricity, and the tables glistening with glass, china and silver. A better appointed restaurant could hardly have been seen anywhere, and even the waiters, in their swallow-

tailed coats and expansive shirt-fronts, were as calm and aristocratic as any that could be found in an uptown hotel.

At the different tables were seated well-dressed men, most of them young, eating their meal with as dainty an air as you would find in the guests at Delmonico's or Sherry's, and conversing in low tones, with a certain well-bred moderation that might hardly have been expected in such a place.

The crook walked across the room, nodding carelessly to the different groups, and seated himself at a table where two chairs were tilted forward, to signify that the places were taken.

He touched the bell on the table, and Charlie Ling appeared as suddenly as if he had been shot up through the floor.

"Oh, you are there, are you?" queried Jim, carelessly.

"Yes, me allee here," answered Charlie Ling, with a cheerful grin.

"Me takee your hat?"

The Chinaman balanced himself on one foot, ready to run if necessary, for Jim's hat was in a bad condition, and there was a certain delicacy in referring to it to be noticed in Charlie Ling's tones that was not lost upon Jim Slider.

But the crook was not disposed to trouble himself about the Chinaman now, and he merely looked at him in a threatening way as Ling took the hat and hung it on a peg with a bang that gave it another dent.

At this moment Swikey strolled carelessly across the room, lingering for an instant at Slippery Jim's table.

"Where's the bloke?" asked Jim, softly, without looking up or appearing to notice Swikey.

"Here in a minute," answered Swikey, in the same guarded manner, as he walked to a swinging door that evidently led to the kitchen.

Mrs. Simpson sat at a counter just inside the door from the hall, where she could see everything going on. There were a glass cigar case, a large tap-bell, and a desk with a brass railing, on the counter, and Mrs. Simpson, in a comfortable high chair, was the presiding goddess, and a pleasant appearing one, too.

Jim took note of all these things, and was apparently as careless about his surroundings as any one could be. But it might have been noticed that his dark eyes glanced around sharply, and that there was nothing in all that big room that escaped him.

Charlie Ling came waddling out of the kitchen with a tray, and placed it before Slider with a flourish.

"Me gettee you a nice steakee," he remarked, with a grin that made his pig-tail turn to one side. "Nice steakee, Slipperee!"

He arranged the viands on the cloth in a neat-handed way, and smacked his lips as if in intense enjoyment of the prospect of a good meal.

He was the only Chinaman in the place, and the aristocratic waiters, in their swallow-tails and white shirt-fronts, were disposed to sneer at him, but they were obliged to confess that Charlie Ling knew his business as well as any of them, and that his customers were as well served as any of those who were waited upon by the French and German gentlemen who put on superior airs.

"See! Me bringee you two dinners," observed Charlie Ling. "You havee some wine?"

"Yes, bring some champagne, and then git out," commanded Slippery Jim.

The Chinaman skipped into the kitchen, dexterously driving his elbow into the stomach of the pompous head waiter as he passed, and laughing with extreme enjoyment as the kitchen door swallowed him.

The pompous waiter looked savagely after the Chinaman, but he knew that Charlie Ling was a privileged character, and that it would be useless to resent anything he did, so he swallowed his wrath as well as he could, and eased his

mind by swearing under his breath at a meek little waiter, with light hair and watery eyes, who spilled a little soup on a tablecloth near him.

Jim Slider squared himself to his meal, and cut a portion of steak for one of the plates, that he deposited in the place opposite his own.

"Vell, Slippery, you here, I see. Vot is the news of the diamonds?"

The voice was that of Levi Cohen, but he was not in the Chinaman's dress in which we have met him hitherto. He was got up in the extreme of fashionable evening dress, but there was a diamond in his shirt front, in contradiction of the canons of taste, and another great solitaire sparkled on one of the fat fingers of his right hand.

Cohen had seated himself in the opposite place, and took the plate that Jim had supplied, in a matter of course way.

"You know I haven't the stones," answered Jim. "Where are they?"

"I have them, my tear. I have them, and beauties they are. But I don't know whether I can keep them, my tear. That's the trouble!"

"Of course. There is always something to trouble you, or you think there is."

"Ah, but there is, this time, my tear. The Splicer is into this thing, and I could only just keep out of his way, my tear. He and the padrone are working together."

"I know that."

"But do you know that they are after you?"

"Of course they are. And they are after you, too."

"Vell, they can find me, and when they have me vhat can they do? I'm a good citizen, with a good clear record. You know that, Jim."

"Yes, I know that," returned Jim, with a sneer. "You are a nice, innocent fellow, and I'm surprised that you get into bad company. I don't pretend to be straight, and it is a pity that you should even sit down to dinner with me."

"Ah, Jim, you are a joker. I love you, Jim."

Cohen smiled a fat, greasy smile, and put out his hand to take that of Slippery Jim, but his companion drew his hand away with a frown.

"Murdering Abraham! What's that?" yelled Cohen, springing from his seat, and pressing his hand to the back of his neck.

Everybody in the room started and looked toward Levi Cohen, who was jumping about with his hand to his neck, puffing in his excitement.

No cause for it could be seen, unless it was Charlie Ling, who was standing behind, with a pained expression on his ingenuous face, and a bottle of champagne, in a napkin, in his hand.

Slippery Jim was certain that the Chinaman was responsible for the disturbance, but he couldn't tell what it was, for Charlie Ling was the picture of innocence, and moreover, it did not seem possible that he could have done anything to Levi without being seen.

"What's the matter, Levi?" asked Jim, looking from one to the other.

"Matter? Oh, suffering Aaron! He's burned the back of mein neck!"

"Burned you?"

"Yes, with a red-hot iron."

Cohen was still skipping about, writhing in pain and holding his neck tightly with the hand on which glistened the diamond ring.

Mrs. Simpson came down from her desk, and walked swiftly over to the Celestial.

"You yellow thief! This settles you! I'll discharge you at once. I took you from the laundry because I wanted to give you a chance, and now the first day you are here you have to assault a good customer, to say nothing of his being your old employer."

Charlie Ling listened meekly to this tirade, and then broke into a howl of grief.

"Quit that racket! You're disturbing the whole place," said Mrs. Simpson.

"Me cantee helpee it. Me notee burn Mistee Cohen. What I burnee him with?"

"That's so. The rascal hasn't anything hot about him that I can see," said Slippery Jim, taking the Chinaman by the shoulder, and swinging him around.

Charlie Ling grinned triumphantly at this vindication, drying his tears on the instant.

Unfortunately for himself, however, he touched the back of Slippery Jim's hand with the cold bottle of wine, and made him shriek and jump away as excitedly as Levi Cohen himself.

"You miserable cuss! That's what it is!" howled Jim.

"Whatee?"

"That bottle!"

"Thisee? Thisee bottle?"

As Charlie Ling spoke, he pressed the bottle against Mrs. Simpson's cheek, and she, too, joined the roaring crowd.

The pompous waiter snatched the bottle from Charlie Ling and dismissed him to the kitchen with a hearty kick, while the room quieted down, and Levi and Jim sat to their table, and remarked that a cold bottle was as bad as a hot poker for producing pain.

The pompous waiter poured out the wine, and Charlie Ling peeped cautiously from the kitchen doorway, with a mischievous grin over the disturbance he had created.

The two men ate their dinner in comparative silence, although each watched the other suspiciously, as if fearing that some advantage might be taken at any moment.

At last Slider asked, quietly: "What do you intend to do with the sparklers?"

"Keep them, my tear, till I can put them away safely."

"What about me?"

"Oh, you vas all right."

There was something extremely irritating to the young man in this easy-going way of disposing of the question, and Slippery Jim drank a glass of wine to hide his annoyance, ere he said:

"I want my share of those stones right away, or else an arrangement to get the Wickworth property through them."

Levi Cohen dropped his air of good-natured carelessness, and hitched his chair a little nearer to his companion as he whispered:

"It vill take a great deal of cutting and contriving, my tear, to put that through, and I'm afraid of it."

Slippery Jim tossed his head contemptuously.

"You're always afraid, Cohen."

"No, I'm not, when there's a chance; but I don't like to go into a thing unless I see my way through. That's all, my tear."

"Well, you must settle what you are going to do right now, because I can't wait any longer. I mean to marry Marcia within a few days, and I must use those diamonds to do it."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that if the padrone is sure that the diamonds cannot be got in any other way, he will give his consent. And the diamonds cannot be got in any other way. Now, you understand?"

"Yes, my tear, I see what you vas driving at."

"Well?"

"Vell, I don't mean to give you the diamonds!"

With a smothered howl of execration, Slippery Jim drew a bowie-knife and made a lunge toward Cohen.

But the Jew was too quick for him, and ere the knife could descend, Slippery Jim was looking into the muzzle of a large six-shooter, and saw that the game would not work.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DESPERATE LEAP.

The little episode between Levi Cohen and Slippery Jim had been conducted so quietly that it had not attracted much attention.

The habitues of that room were used to disputes in which deadly weapons were drawn, and so long as no shots were fired and no one fell with a knife-wound in his heart, it was not customary to interfere.

"Put your knife in your pocket, my tear, and listen to reason," said Cohen, as he nervously moved his finger on the trigger of his revolver, which was still pointed at Slippery Jim.

Jim obeyed, and Levi, as he put his pistol out of sight, sought to improve the occasion with a little advice:

"You are too hasty, my tear. You should keep cool, like your uncle Cohen, and you would not get into so many scraps."

Slippery Jim drank a glass of wine, and did not answer.

"I don't mean to give you the diamonds, because I don't think it would be wise just now," resumed Cohen, "but I mean to help you marry the girl when the time comes."

"Why didn't you say so at first?" growled Slippery Jim.

Levi Cohen did not answer. His eyes were on a couple who had just entered the room and taken a seat near.

One was a dark-browed man, with a big slouch hat, which he removed and gave to a waiter, revealing a mass of black, curly hair, and a generally foreign appearance. The other was a tall, wiry-looking, elderly man, with straggling gray whiskers and the general aspect of a farmer from Wayback.

They were the padrone and Hezekiah Dodds!

Slippery Jim and Levi Cohen looked at the new-comers curiously, but did not speak, while the two at the other table seemed to be entirely unconscious of the presence of Jim and the Jew.

There were not many people in the room now. The dinner hour was about over, and most of the guests, having finished their meal, had lighted cigars and strolled out, more than one of them to engage in some lawless job that would furnish them enough money to visit the restaurant again to-morrow, well supplied with the means to take a comfortable, stylish meal and a costly cigar afterward.

Hezekiah glanced good-humoredly around the room, taking in Jim and the Jew in the course of his sweeping gaze, but not picking them out particularly, and beckoned to the pompous head-waiter.

"What hev yer for dinner?"

"There is the menu, sir," was the dignified answer, as the pompous waiter handed the gilt-edged bill of fare to the farmer.

"Oh, thet thar is the programme, is it? I don't see no beans on it. Oh, yes, there they are, ez sure ez you are born. Bring me some pork and beans."

Levi Cohen could not repress a shiver of disgust as he heard the word pork, and the farmer grinned.

"Bring my friend here some macaroni," added Hezekiah, "and some of thet there sour wine."

The pompous waiter gave the order to another waiter, and looked suspiciously at Hezekiah, who was apparently as unconscious of the waiter's attention as of that of every one else in the room, from Mrs. Simpson down.

With the exception of the waiters in their swallow-tails, there was not a person in that room that did not recognize Hezekiah Dodds as the dreaded Bowles the Splicer, while the padrone was even still better known.

The wonder was to see those two together, when it was well known that the padrone had tried to do away with the detective at the Chinese house on Mott street only the night before.

These things are soon noised abroad among the class most interested in New York, and the adventures of the detective the night before, and the padrone's part in them, were current gossip among Mrs. Simpson's guests already.

The pork and beans and macaroni were brought, and it seemed to be Hezekiah's sole purpose to dispose of his meal as

quickly as possible, without troubling himself about any one else.

Slippery Jim and Levi Cohen were fascinated by the detective and his companion, and could not help glancing at them furtively from time to time, all of which the detective saw and enjoyed, although he did not allow the fact to appear.

The pork and beans had nearly disappeared, when Charlie Ling's unlucky star brought him into the room and caused him to stop immediately in front of the detective and the padrone, with his mouth wide open in astonishment.

"Vellee! How are you, pad—"

Before he could get out any more, Hezekiah had thrown half a glass of water into his face, and set him spluttering like a half-drowned puppy.

"Oh, vatee you doing? Me allee samee drownee!"

"I beg your pardon, John. Gol darned ef I see yer standin' there, nohow," said the detective.

"Me no Johnnee. Me Charlie Lingee! You know me, and I know you."

Then, turning to Levi Cohen, he said:

"There he is, Mistee Cohen. There he is. Allee samee he gotee away. Now I takee him, if you say."

He came close to Levi in his eagerness, and received a slap on his ear for his pains, as Levi, with a terrific frown, pointed to the kitchen door.

"Allee lightee. If you not wantee him, don'tee blame Charlie Lingee."

And, with an injured air, the Chinaman stepped over to the kitchen door and disappeared, but not without relieving his mind by making a hideous grimace at Levi as he went through the doorway.

Levi saw that the detective was lighting a cigar, and had apparently made up his mind to remain at the table for some time. What was his game?

If it were only possible to talk to Slippery Jim, and compare notes over the detective's mysterious conduct, it would not be so bad. But that was impossible, because the detective and padrone were so near that any utterance would be overheard, no matter how soft it might be.

A happy thought struck Cohen. He would try the deaf and dumb alphabet!

So he slowly and laboriously spelled out on his fingers: "What do you think is their game?"

Slippery Jim had brought his two hands upon the table, evidently with the intention of answering in the same manner, when Levi happened to glance across at the other table, and saw that the detective had his fingers in position, and, almost in spite of himself, the Jew watched as Hezekiah rapidly spelled out:

"Wait awhile, and maybe you will see."

"He is the devil himself, I believe," thought Levi Cohen, and the detective smiled in a knowing way, as if he read the other's thoughts and agreed with them.

For ten minutes longer the four people sat there. Every other table was empty now, and the only other persons in the room were Mrs. Simpson and the pompous waiter, who was waiting to see how long the detective and padrone would be.

Suddenly Levi Cohen arose and walked to the desk with his check in his hand and paid the bill.

The detective did not move, but kept on smoking, even when Slippery Jim also got up and followed Cohen. As for the padrone, he might have been dozing, so quiet did he sit, with his cigarette between his lips, emitting a thick curl of blue smoke at intervals.

Cohen and Jim went through the doorway, and then Hezekiah sprang into action.

With the single word, "Come!" to his companion, he was out of the door and in the dark hall.

There were a few smothered exclamations, and then the detective had Levi by the throat and was bearing him backward to the floor.

"Vhat do you want?" came in choking accents from the Jew's throat.

"You know what I want, gol durn yer, an' I'm goin' ter hev them, too, right

now," hissed the detective, as he tightened his terrible grasp on the Jew's throat.

It was then that Slippery Jim came to the rescue—or tried to do so—by pulling at the detective's shoulders.

The three tore and struggled with each other, but without making much noise.

It is possible that Mrs. Simpson suspected something going on in the hall, but she did not come out to see how the affair progressed. She had maintained her pleasant relations with the police for years by never knowing anything, and she was not likely to get herself into trouble now by being too inquisitive.

It was at this juncture that Slippery Jim, in his endeavor to drag Levi Cohen from the clutches of the detective, happened to place his hand on Cohen's chest and felt a hard lump there.

"The diamonds!" he thought.

The padrone took a hand now, and held Cohen's hands to his side with an iron grip. Neither the detective nor the padrone was holding Slippery Jim, and he was in the best position of the four, for his hands were free.

"Cuss him! I'll have them now, and there will be nothing to prevent my getting the girl, without any help from him."

As these reflections swept through his brain, he fumbled anxiously inside the Jew's coat to find the secret pocket that he knew contained the Wickworth diamonds.

Cohen knew what Slippery Jim was doing, and fought with all his might to get free, while the detective and padrone were equally determined that he should not get away.

Slippery Jim grinned in the dark as he noted how the detective and padrone were playing right into his hands.

"Cuss this coat! Where is the pocket?" he thought.

It was of no use. There was no opening to the pocket to be found, and only a knife could be serviceable here.

The bowie-knife that had threatened Levi's life a short time before was again brought into use, but not to inflict personal injury this time.

With a dexterous application of the point of the weapon to the lining of the coat, Slippery Jim made a hole through which he could easily thrust his long fingers and seize the top of the chamois-leather bag.

He could not repress a cry of triumph as he brought the receptacle forth and hid it in his breast pocket.

"They are mine!" he half-shouted, as he ran up the stairs three at a time.

The shout and the sudden retreat of Slippery Jim conveyed the same meaning to all three of the others at one time.

By common consent they released each other, and all flew up the stairs after the cunning thief who had outwitted all of them.

The staircase was dark, and the smell of cheese on the first landing told them that they were close to the warehouse.

Slippery Jim's steps were light, and they could not hear where he was, but they knew that he must have gone up.

Had he opened a door the draught and the inevitable creaking would have revealed the fact, because the old house was too stiff and out of plumb to admit of a noiseless moving of anything in connection with it. Even Slippery Jim's footsteps would have betrayed themselves were it not that the creaking made by his pursuers drowned all other noises of the same character.

Up the stairs they tore after the young man, until they reached the fourth story.

This was the top of the house, and the current of air that struck their faces from a certain direction told them that there was a door open in front of the house.

It was very dark, but as they groped their way along the top hall toward the place whence the air came, they saw a lighter space, that they knew must be the open doorway of a room in which there was a window.

"Now we havea him," growled the padrone, as he rushed forward.

"Yes, my tear, indeed ve have," added

Levi Cohen, forgetting his fear of the detective in his anxiety to catch Slippery Jim.

"Don't holler afore you are out of the wood," suggested Hezekiah Dodds, in his farmer vernacular. "Thet there Slippery Jim deserves his name, and I won't feel sure on him till I hev my grip on his collar. I was a gol durned fool not to take him downstairs, when I had him, without giving him a chance to play this trick on me."

"But Marcia," whispered the padrone.

The detective stopped short, and slapped his leg.

"Thet's so, padrone. Burn me if I hadn't forgotten the kid for the moment. Yes, there is Marcia. It was better ez it was, of course. We'll hev Slippery Jim and the diamonds, and Marcia and all, afore we sleep. You jist watch yer Uncle Hezekiah, and see if I ain't givin' yer a straight steer."

These few words were exchanged in much less time than it takes to tell of them, and the padrone was already at the other end of the room when the detective slapped his leg.

"Father Abraham! Where is he?" exclaimed Levi Cohen, in agony. "He vas in here, but v'ere is he?"

A dark figure suddenly sprang up from the ground at his side, and a foot behind his heels threw him flat on his back, as Slippery Jim's well-known voice said, with an exasperating laugh:

"Here he is, Levi!"

"Yes, and by the hokey, here am I, too!" shouted Hezekiah, as he threw himself upon Jim.

The detective had caught Slippery Jim by the shoulder, but not with as firm a grasp as he would have liked. There was a short, sharp struggle, and then, as Hezekiah tried to get a better hold, Slippery Jim made good his sobriquet by gliding out of his grasp, and with a yell of desperation, dashed through the window, smashing the sash and glass to atoms, and disappeared.

"A fall of fifty feet, at least!" shouted the detective.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SWING FOR LIFE.

For a few seconds after Slippery Jim had jumped through the window the three men stood quite still. The action had been so sudden and unexpected that they were literally paralyzed for the moment.

The Jew was the first to recover himself. The thought of the diamonds being in the pocket of Slippery Jim was too much for him, and he rushed to the door to follow the thief to the street, where he had no doubt his dead body was lying.

"Don't let thet cuss go," said the detective, hurriedly. "Catch him, padrone."

The padrone ran to the door, and dragged Levi Cohen back in no gentle manner.

"You comea here! We wanta you."

"But, my tear, he has the diamonds in his pocket!" blurted out Levi Cohen.

"Oh, he hez, hez he?"

The detective was glad to get this verification of his suspicions, and Levi saw that he had made a mistake.

"I mean, my tear, that perhaps he has the diamonds."

"Never mind what you mean. Stay here!" commanded Hezekiah, as he dragged the Jew away from the door.

The padrone ran to the window, pulled out the fragments of wood and glass that were all that remained of the sash and looked out into the darkness.

"Santa Maria! He not dead!"

"Vhat you mean, my tear?" exclaimed Levi, as he looked out.

As he spoke he threw off his coat and hat, and jumped through the window also.

"What are them there 'tarnal idiots doing?" cried Hezekiah.

He ran to the window, saw the situation, and dragging the padrone with him, ran out of the room.

What had they seen out of the window that caused them so much excitement?

Simply the figure of Slippery Jim standing on an abutment in the brickwork just below the window, and holding on by an iron gutter pipe that ran along to the next house.

When Levi first saw him, he was below the window, but before the Jew could get down to him he had worked his way along for some distance from the window, and evidently intended to reach the roof of the next house, which was one story lower than this one.

"Shtop there, you miserable thief!" yelled Levi, as he tried to follow Slippery Jim along the abutment, holding on with all his strength to the crazy iron gutter, that seemed so ready to give way.

It was at this moment that Hezekiah and the padrone ran away from the window, in the hope of catching Slippery Jim before he could get entirely away.

Jim did not answer the tirade of Levi, because he had something else to occupy his attention. He was desperate, and had taken desperate chances.

The little ledge upon which his feet rested ended at the dividing line between the two houses, and the gutter ran along the eaves.

It was his intention to draw himself up by the gutter, reach the roof of the adjoining house, and make his way to the street at the first opportunity, whether it might be through that house, or by running for some distance along the roofs, till he could find a suitable place of exit.

Levi was coming up behind him, and he must act quickly if he were to escape at all.

He knew perfectly well that Levi would rather that the two of them should be dashed to the stones of the street below than that he (Slippery Jim) should get away with the Wickworth diamonds.

"Shtop, you Jim!" cried Levi, as he came after Jim, hand over hand, along the gutter.

The gutter creaked and shook with the strain of the two men upon it, and Slippery Jim noted, with a shudder, that there was nothing but a very frail support between him and death, to say nothing of Levi Cohen, whose death he would not have considered any particular loss.

"Shtop!" shouted Levi again, and the gutter shook ominously.

"Go back!" was Slippery Jim's reply. "This thing will break down with the weight of two of us!"

"Let it break! What do I care? Give me the diamonds!"

Slippery Jim made no reply. He had reached the end of the abutment, and he was trying to make up his mind what to do next.

He must take his feet off the brickwork, and this would throw all his weight upon the gutter.

"It will never stand it!" he muttered. "If that infernal Jew would only go back, or drop off, it would be easy."

"Jim!" cried Levi.

"Well, what is it?"

"Vill you give me the diamonds?"

"No! Curse you!" was Slippery Jim's savage reply.

"Vell, then, look out!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I vill show you!"

Slippery Jim looked back and saw, in the dim light that was hardly more than shadow, the glint of a pistol barrel.

"You are not going to shoot, are you?"

"Ain't I? That vas all you know! Give me those diamonds, or I'll blow your brains out."

Slippery Jim knew that he was in deadly peril, but his nerve did not desert him. He was noted as a good bluffer when he played poker, and he tried the same tactics now.

"Shoot and be hanged to you!" he yelled, defiantly. "And lose the diamonds. If I drop into the street that will be the end of them. If you catch me up here, you will get half, at least."

"Murdering Abraham! I'll have them all!"

Levi Cohen saw that there was truth in Slippery Jim's declaration that the diamonds would be irretrievably lost if he shot down his companion, and he put the pistol back into his hip pocket. But he determined to circumvent Slippery Jim somehow.

"Go back, Levi, and I'll come, too," said Jim.

"Oh, no, you von't. You don't mean to come back and fall into the hands of the padrone and the Splicer. What vas the use of your saying that?"

Slippery Jim was trying to gain time. He knew that if he could only get Levi into a discussion, it would last for as long as he liked, and all the time the talking was going on the young man's brain was hard at work.

He had inspected the gutter and the next house narrowly, and saw that the gutter was much stronger further along, being, in fact, an entirely new one, while that to which he and Levi were clinging was old and worn out.

If he could throw himself over and catch the other gutter, he would be able to work himself along, and be out of the reach of Levi, and any other pursuers.

It would be a terrible risk, but he was prepared to take it, for the sake of saving the diamonds and obtaining Marcia for his wife, with all the wealth that would fall to her eventually.

What had become of the detective and the padrone he did not know, but he was sufficiently acquainted with the character of both to be sure that they were actively following up the hunt, wherever they might be.

The gutter that he desired to reach was about four feet away, and he would be obliged to let himself fall over that distance, on the chance of catching the gutter before he fell into the street. There was the other chance of whether the new gutter would support him when he did reach it—if he did—but he did not consider that worth thought, in view of the first risk.

In the mean time, Levi was standing quite still, holding on, and watching Slippery Jim. He had made up his mind that the young man could not get away, and although his own position was not the most comfortable, and he was afraid of falling into the hands of his enemies, Hezekiah Dodds and the padrone, any moment, he was prepared to stay where he was till some move was made by Slippery Jim, however long a time it might be. Slippery Jim had the Wickworth diamonds, and that was quite enough for Levi Cohen.

After a moment's pause Slippery Jim looked around and above him, and then made up his mind that he must make the leap now or never.

He braced his feet as firmly on the brickwork as he could, and then, holding his body perfectly stiff, that he might give it all the impetus possible, he threw himself over sideways.

One dizzy instant he was in the air, but the next his right hand caught the edge of the gutter, and he was hanging, while his left hand clawed the atmosphere, seeking for the support.

The edge of the gutter seemed as if it would cut his one hand in two, but he bore the pain, because he knew that it would be death to let go, and then his left hand found the edge of the iron, and he was comparatively safe.

It is true there was nothing under his feet, but he was strong and wiry, and could easily support his own weight with his two hands, although it was a rather difficult proceeding with one.

Levi saw the movement with dismay. He worked himself along quickly to the end of the abutment, where Slippery Jim had thrown himself off, but it was too risky a thing to be imitated, and although Levi would have done almost anything to keep within reach of the Wickworth diamonds, he felt that this was rather too much.

So he contented himself with watching the proceedings of Slippery Jim and making up his mind that he must get to the

street as soon as the young man fell, trusting to the excitement to enable him to secure the diamonds before the padrone or detective.

As for Slippery Jim, he was trying to decide on his next course of proceeding.

He pulled himself up as far as he could, but the gutter was on the extreme edge of a coping, and it was physically impossible for him to draw himself to the roof by his hands.

There were two windows in the house just below him, and he made up his mind that he must swing himself into one of them through the glass.

He would probably be badly cut, but, as he said to himself with a grim smile, he had jumped through one window that night without being badly hurt, and he would have to take the risk of going through another.

He made sure that he had a firm grip of the gutter, and putting his two feet against the wall below him, he pushed himself as far out as he could, and allowed himself to swing in. He repeated this movement and soon had himself swinging backward and forward with considerable force.

"One more swing, and then I will let myself go through the window," he thought.

He gave himself a tremendous push from the wall, and was coming back with his feet close together, intending to go sweeping through the window like a battering ram, when something closed over his right wrist, and he knew that a man's hand was around it.

Like a vise the clutch of the unseen one above held the wrist, and then deliberately pulled his grasp away from the gutter.

A more helpless situation than Slippery Jim's now could hardly be conceived.

The man holding his right wrist, whoever he was, bore all the weight of that side, and Slippery Jim dared not try to pull himself away, because it would have meant a fall into space. On the other hand, he could not get away until the unseen one chose to allow him.

"He has you now, Jim, my tear!" said Levi Cohen, mockingly.

"Cuss you! Let go!" hissed Slippery Jim.

"Not jest yet, Slippery. This is too gol-durned good a thing," coolly remarked Hezekiah Dodds, as he looked over the edge of the parapet with a smile.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHERE DID HE GO?

"Trapped!" muttered Slippery Jim.

"What about the diamonds now?" was Levi Cohen's unuttered thought.

"The Wickworth diamonds at last!" was what the detective was thinking, as he kept his iron grasp upon Slippery Jim's wrist.

"My poor little Marcia! She nota geta the diamon' now, after all!"

As these reflections passed through the several minds of the actors in this drama at the same moment, they did not consume any time to speak of, and Hezekiah Dodds was finishing the job he had begun—that of securing Slippery Jim so that he should not escape with the diamonds.

It was all very well holding his wrist in this way, but it could not last forever, and it was necessary to take measures to bring the young man into some position where he could be handled comfortably and be relieved of his booty.

What was to be done?

The detective was fertile in expedients, and one suggested itself to him at once. Taking from his pocket the handcuffs he had found in the Chinese den in Mott street, he fastened one around the right wrist of his prisoner, and then, allowing Jim to clutch the gutter again with that hand, held the loose cuff, so that he could follow the movements of the young man.

Meanwhile Levi Cohen, seeing that the game was up for the present, was swiftly but unostentatiously working his way back to the window from which he had emerged. It was better to take chances.

of getting out through the house than to stay here now.

"Look out for him, padrone," cried the detective, whose quick eyes caught everything. "Don't let Levi go."

"Alla righta! I catcha him," returned the padrone, who had followed the detective to the roof, but who now disappeared swiftly through the trap and back to the house they had left.

Slippery Jim was in a bad fix, and he knew it, but his defiant nature asserted itself even now.

He knew that the detective could not get him up until he chose to go up, and he had not quite made up his mind whether he would dash himself to the street below or try his original plan of throwing himself through the window, against which he could place his feet when he desired.

As for the detective holding his wrist by the handcuff, he did not attach much importance to that, because he felt sure that a sudden jerk would release him.

"Now, Jim, the game's up. So come along," suggested the detective, over the edge of the parapet.

"Come along where?"

For answer, the detective leaned over the parapet, and, bracing his legs around a chimney behind him, seized the two wrists of Slippery Jim, and with a gigantic effort, pulled him up so far that he hung over the edge of the parapet, with the lower half of his body dangling and the upper on the roof.

It was now, when he was actually in the clutches of the detective, and felt that the precious diamonds must go out of his possession, that Slippery Jim's fierce nature asserted itself in a marked manner.

"Come on, Jim," repeated Hezekiah.

For answer, Slippery Jim threw his arms around the detective's neck, and with a smothered oath grasped him like a steel trap.

"What are yer goin' ter do?" asked Hezekiah, as he felt himself slipping over the roof.

Slippery Jim grinned triumphantly, for he, too, felt that the detective was losing his hold on the roof.

"I'm going to show you that you can't get the best of Slippery Jim. That's all!"

There could be no doubt that Slippery Jim meant all he said, for he was pulling at the other with all his might.

Hezekiah Dodds was not a man to be easily frightened, and now that he recognized how useless it would be to remonstrate with Slippery Jim, he made up his mind to fight it out on this line, and let the fellow have it his own way.

"Pull away, then, gol darn yer," he spluttered. "An' see who will be tired first."

He did not resist the tugs of Jim now, but suddenly yielding, allowed himself to hang at full length by the parapet, with his legs twisted around the thief.

The unexpected movement nearly threw Jim from his support, and a shade of greenish-white passed over his face, in spite of his desperate character. He was nearly lost that time, and he knew it.

As Slippery Jim hung to the parapet one of the handcuffs dangled loosely from his left wrist, and an idea struck Hezekiah Dodds.

Slippery Jim was shifting a little away from the detective, to avoid a rusty and jagged part of the gutter that hurt his hand. As his attention was thus occupied the detective noted a good-sized hole in the iron gutter that had been made perhaps for a large bolt, or might have been the result of accident. At all events, there it was.

"Just the thing!" he muttered.

Fortunately his muscles were like steel, and he was able to hold himself by one hand for a few seconds without difficulty. His great strength stood him in good stead now, for, releasing his right-hand hold, and before Slippery Jim knew what was happening, the detective seized the loose handcuff and snapped it in the hole in the gutter, and Slippery Jim was firmly fastened to the gutter, powerless to move.

"Cuss yer!" howled Jim. "I'll make it pleasant for you for this." He kicked violently at the detective, but Hezekiah easily avoided him, and bestowed a bland smile upon him that was maddening.

"Where's that cuss of a Cohen? Why don't he come and help me?" Then, raising his voice, he shouted: "Levi! Levi!"

But Levi had disappeared. He had gone back through the broken sash, and nothing had been heard of him since. Whether he had met the padrone, or what had become of him, neither Slippery Jim nor the detective knew.

"Now, Jim, before I leave yer, I'll be dod-gasted ef I don't go through yer pockets," observed Hezekiah, pleasantly.

"Not if I know myself," retorted Slippery Jim, savagely.

"But yer don't know yerself in this case. Yer see, yer can't help yerself."

Thus saying, the detective coolly reached toward the inside pocket of Slippery Jim's coat, on the right, and helped himself to the bag, that he found without difficulty.

Slippery Jim writhed and kicked, but his right hand was fastened to the gutter, and he could not get at the detective's hand with his left, because the pocket was on that side. If any one thinks it is an easy thing to place his left hand in his left inside pocket, let him try it, and he may be undeceived.

The detective pocketed the bag with a smile of pleasure, and Slippery Jim glared at him with murder in his face, as well as in his heart.

Then the detective looked to see how he was to escape from his predicament.

This was anything but an easy thing, for he had little faith in his ability to swing himself through the window, as Jim had intended, and he certainly could not pull himself up to the roof.

Slippery Jim divined his difficulty and grinned maliciously, although his own muscles ached so that he felt as if he could not endure the agony much longer.

But Hezekiah Dodds was not known as the Splicer for nothing.

While on the roof of the house, just before he had pulled Slippery Jim halfway up, he had noticed that there was a flagstaff on the comb of the roof. The flag that swung there sometimes was gone, but the rope that belonged to it was still reeved through the top of the pole, and one end hung down to within a foot of the edge of the parapet.

"Why didn't I fix that rope before I came down here?" muttered the detective regretfully.

Then he remembered that Slippery Jim had pulled him down before he had intended, and that therefore it was not his own fault that he had not completed all arrangements for going up beforehand.

However, that was not the main thing now. What he wanted to know was how he was to get that rope, for that he must get it somehow was essential.

Hanging as he was, he could not possibly reach the end of a rope a foot away from the edge of the parapet without some extra means.

"I hev it!" he muttered. "I'll get it."

Holding by one hand, he rapidly untied his long neck-handkerchief—which was of the old-fashioned kind, as befitted his character of a backwood farmer—and, with his teeth, tied one end of it to his pocket-knife.

"What are you going to do?" asked Slippery Jim, who, having found a resting-place for his feet in an accidental break in the wall, where part of a brick had been chipped out, was now comparatively comfortable and could look around him.

"Wait and you will see, Jim," was the reply, as Hezekiah made a cast with his knife at the end of the neck-handkerchief, and tried to catch the bight of the rope.

Slippery Jim was much interested in this game of skill, in spite of his unpleasant predicament, as men will, no matter how they may be placed.

Three times the detective threw his knife at the rope, and three times, when he pulled it toward him, the rope stayed

where it was. But the fourth time the knife caught in the snarl, and, with joy, he felt the resistance, and knew that he had the rope.

"Now do yer see what I'm a-doin', Jim?" he asked, smilingly.

Slippery Jim did not answer. The handcuff hurt his wrist, and he was becoming very tired of his position, although the rest for his feet did help him considerably.

The detective pulled at the rope, and soon had about thirty feet hanging to him.

His first act was to fasten one end of the rope around his waist, which his ability as a splicer enabled him to do with one hand, in a dexterous fashion that Slippery Jim was obliged to admire.

"Thet's in case it should slip out of my hand," he explained, graciously. "Now to fix it so that I can get up."

In the loose end of the rope he quickly made a large loop, knotting it securely, so that it could not slip, and then letting it hang for a moment while he rested, for he had been hanging by one hand most of the time, and the muscles of his arms felt as if they were being pulled out altogether.

"You're a dandy!" observed Slippery Jim, in involuntary admiration.

"Yes, kinder think I am, myself," was the detective's cheerful rejoinder. "We'll get there after a while."

Now came the supreme effort. He must throw the loop of the rope over the chimney before-mentioned, and he must do it under the most difficult circumstances—while hanging by one hand, and with little opportunity to swing the rope.

But the detective was not an ordinary man, and he had no doubt about his ability to accomplish the feat.

He gathered up the slack of the line in loose coils, and swinging it around his head twice, sent it flying over the parapet.

Well cast! The rope spun out like a long serpent, and then, settling down gracefully, the loop went over the chimney stack, and was secured.

Without wasting a moment, the detective pulled at the rope to make sure that it was fast, and then, climbing hand over hand, was over the parapet and on the roof before Slippery Jim realized his intention.

"Well, that was a quick move, sure," he growled. "Now, I wonder how long I am to stay here."

But he was not allowed to wonder more than half a minute.

Hezekiah had gained his point in securing the diamonds, and he was tired of the hustling he had had for the last two days.

He wanted to put Slippery Jim and the other rascals in a place of safety, and bring his task to a conclusion.

"So I'll just bring Mr. Jim up here, turn him over to the first officer I meet, and then settle with the padrone and Levi," he thought.

He untied the rope from his own waist and made a loop in it that he could throw over Slippery Jim's head and under his arms, and then hauled him up.

He soon completed his preparations, and then said, musingly:

"I suppose I must take that handcuff off first, but, by gosh, I'm afraid he may fall. He must be pretty tired with hanging there so long. I know I was about petered out, and he was there longer than I was."

He lay flat on the roof and called: "Jim!"

No answer.

"By gosh, I wonder if he's fainted or something. Shouldn't wonder. He's hanging under this here parapet, and I can't see him. Jim!"

Still no answer.

The detective was about to call again, when his eye fell upon the handcuffs.

One of them was fastened to the gutter, as he had placed it, but the other one was empty.

Slippery Jim had disappeared!

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER ABDUCTION.

When Levi Cohen made his way back into the room, it was with no clear idea

beyond getting away from the detective and the padrone, who had somehow enlisted himself on the side of the Splicer—most likely in a spirit of revenge, because he had lost the diamonds.

The room was empty, and the splinters of broken wood and glass on the window-sill had not been disturbed.

"I'll just walk quietly down stairs, and go away," he muttered. "I can settle with Slippery Jim another time."

Thus saying, he reached the landing just as the padrone got to the door.

The darkness favored Levi. He had no desire to meet the padrone now, and when he saw that he could avoid him in the darkness, he availed himself of the opportunity.

"Who 'thata?' demanded the padrone, who could just distinguish a shadow.

But Levi did not answer, save by jumping for the staircase, and going down three stairs at a time, with considerable noise and confusion.

"Stoppa!" yelled the padrone.

But Levi only quickened his movements, and had reached the landing outside the door of the room in which Marcia was confined just as the padrone, with a flying leap, dropped upon his back.

"You nota get away now!" hissed the padrone.

"Von't I? Ve'll see!" was the breathless reply of Levi.

The two men wrestled with each other violently, and banged with tremendous force against the door, as Marcia's screams could be heard inside the room.

"Ah! My Marcia! My leetle girl!" cried the padrone, wildly.

He threw all his strength into his struggle with his antagonist, and hurling him against the door, broke it clear off its hinges, just as the combatants fell over each other at the very feet of the terrified girl.

"Father!" she cried, as she threw herself upon her knees at his side, and tried to keep his assailant from him.

Levi jumped to his feet, but made no attempt to leave the room. He was too much interested in watching the padrone, and was wondering how he could retrieve the ground that he had lost in the matter of the diamonds by revealing the plot of himself and Slippery Jim to make the girl the price of the diamonds.

The padrone looked from Marcia to Levi, and then the truth seemed to strike him.

"You broughta my leetle girl here?"

He glared at Cohen, and that gentleman felt that it was a dangerous situation.

"No, my tear, I didn't. Ask Marcia," he added, eagerly. "She vill tell you."

"Marcia, dida he bringa you here?"

"No, father. But—"

"Ah, there is a buta. He was in thisa thinga somehow, eh?"

"No, padrone. Von't you listen to reason. It vas that fellow, Slippery Jim. It vas all him."

"You're a liar," shouted the voice of Slippery Jim, with such distinctness that it seemed to be in the very room, although he was not to be seen.

Marcia trembled at the sound of that voice. She was a brave girl, but the excitement of the night had been almost too much for her, and she was in mortal terror of that dark-eyed, savage man, who had declared that she should be his wife, in spite of all opposition.

"Where is that fellow? Maladetto! Where isa thata Slippera Jim?"

"I don't know, father. But take me from this place. Take me away, and let me never see it again."

"Buta the diamon'?"

"They are safe," broke in the voice of the detective. "I have them. Padrone, take Marcia home. I will be with you in the course of an hour, and then you will know more about the diamonds and the Wickworth estate than you do now."

The padrone picked up a wrap that belonged to his girl, placed it tenderly over her shoulders, and then threw the black shawl over her head.

"Come, Marcia!"

The girl took the padrone's arm, and

the two walked out of the room, over the broken door, and down the stairs, while the detective watched them, but keeping a wary eye on Levi, notwithstanding.

"I guess I vill go, too," observed Levi, smoothly.

The detective placed his hand on Cohen's shoulder.

"I don't know about that there, Levi. I might want yer."

"Vell, you can find me at the crib, can't yer? You know I would not try to get away from you again," said the Jew, smoothly.

The detective smiled. He knew Levi Cohen pretty well, and he had no faith in his protestations. In this case, however, he could not see that it would do any harm to let him go, for he felt convinced that the gentleman would not attempt to elude him again.

"Go on, then, Levi."

"All right. I vas going."

"Where's your coat? You don't want to go through the streets like that, do you?"

The Jew was still in his shirt-sleeves, and hatless. It will be remembered that he divested himself of his hat and coat when he jumped through the upper window, to follow Slippery Jim.

"Moses! You vas right, Splicer. I vill go up and get them. I von't be long, my tear."

He ran upstairs with alacrity. Besides looking for his coat and hat, he thought he might find something about Slippery Jim, and get at the explanation of the mystery of that worthy's voice being heard so plainly a few moments ago.

The detective sat down by the window, in deep thought. The ruin around him, and the adventures he had passed through within the last thirty-six hours, did not prevent his giving himself up to a well-connected reverie. He was used to thinking under strange and exciting circumstances, and he could make his plans as easily now as if he had been sitting in his study in his Chicago home—for he had a very comfortable sanctum in one of the most home-like residences in that city, in spite of his jay appearance now.

He felt his coat, to make sure that the bag of diamonds was safe, and then deliberately lighted a cigar, and began to smoke.

"I'll just wait here till something turns up," he thought. "Those people are certain to come here to find out what I am doing, and that will save me the trouble of looking after them."

This thought brought a smile to his face, and he was evidently enjoying his cigar extremely.

The padrone and Marcia reached the bottom of the stairs, and were about to go toward the front door, when a voice hissed in the girl's ear:

"Not yet!"

At the same moment she felt herself torn away from her father's arms, and then she became unconscious, while a powerful odor, like almonds, filled the air, even drowning the strong smell of the cheese.

"Whata the matta?" exclaimed the padrone, who had felt the girl dragged from him, but had not heard the words of the stranger.

There was no answer to his question, and he groped about the dark hall till he reached the front door, which he threw open, that the glow of the street lamp across the road might throw a little light into the dreary entry.

He looked hastily along the hall, but it was deserted.

The padrone was accustomed to boast of his strong nerves when he happened to be one of a party enjoying relaxation, in a restaurant or elsewhere, but in spite of his nerves, he could not repress a superstitious feeling of fear over the mysterious occurrences in this extraordinary house.

The detective was quietly smoking when a scuffle on the landing made him clutch his cigar tighter in his teeth, and watch for developments.

In the gloom he could just see some-

thing sweep by, and heard the rustle of a woman's garments.

In an instant he had reached the doorway, where the broken door still lay and grasped at the something passing.

But there was nothing there.

"Gol darn it! They went upstairs almighty quick!" he muttered, as he dashed up three at a time.

He reached the top of the house, looked into the room with the open window, peeped out of the window, and then searched all over the landing.

No one there.

The detective was beginning to be mystified—almost worried. This was becoming more exciting every minute.

"That cussed Slippery Jim is in this thing, of course. But where in thunderation has he gone?"

He felt in his pocket again, and was reassured to find that the diamonds were safe.

"He's such a slick cuss, that I shouldn't hev been surprised if he'd got them away from me somehow, without coming near me!"

He smiled slightly at this superstitious idea, and turned to go down stairs.

At the first landing he met the padrone, out of breath, and evidently frightened, as could be made out from his short, jerky sentences and agitated manner, for it was too dark to see his face.

"Gonea! My Marcia! My leetle girl! She gonea! Maladetto! Thata Jima! I killa him!"

"What's the matter, padrone?"

The detective was only just beginning to understand what the flying shadows had been.

"She gonea, I tella you! Gonea!"

Without answering, the detective dashed down the stairs, dragging the padrone with him.

They must be in the house, somewhere, and he would find them, if he had to tear the roof off.

Down to the basement, and to the dining room, where Charlie Ling was the only person in charge, curled up, asleep, on a table.

"Get up!" commanded the detective, as he gave the Chinaman a hard slap on his back.

Charlie Ling sat up on the table, with his feet drawn up under him, and blinked idiotically at the detective and padrone, alternately.

"Where's Slippery Jim?" demanded the detective.

"Slipperee Jeem? I notee seen him. Don'tee you know where he is, Splicee?"

"Nota seena him? Why, he wasa here a littla timea ago," put in the padrone.

"What a picturesque liar a Chinaman can be," observed the detective, with something like admiration in his tone.

And Charlie Ling, grinning sweetly, murmured "Yes."

CHAPTER XX.

MARGHERITA'S COUGH.

The scene shifts to the laundry on Mott street.

The front door and shutters are closed, and securely bolted, and the only light in the room is a small lamp upon the floor behind the screen, so that its reflection could not be seen from the street, even if the shutters were open.

There are two men and a woman sitting around the lamp, shading it still more, and they are in deep conversation.

They are Levi Cohen, Slippery Jim and Mrs. Simpson.

It is the morning after the events narrated in the last chapter, and it is broad daylight outside.

Slippery Jim is speaking.

"Well, we have the girl all right, and I don't think that cussed Splicer suspects where she is. We did not take him to that part of the crib the other night, and he will think he knows all about it. That's the way with these detective guys. They find out one thing and never give us credit for having anything more in reserve. We can fool Splicer Bowles yet."

"Yes, deary, you are a smart boy," broke in Mrs. Simpson, in a soft voice,

"but I wouldn't depend too much upon the Splicer not being suspicious. He's as smart as a steel trap."

"I don't care how sharp he is. I have made up my mind to carry this thing through, and I'll do it, as sure as I'm sitting here. And as soon as the job is finished, I'll settle with him personally, for these."

He held up his hands, and showed that the palm of each was cut by the edge of the gutter upon which he had hung so long, and that there was a cruel abrasion on his wrist, caused by the handcuff upon which he had been obliged to rest a good part of his weight during his long suspension from the roof of the house.

"He wouldn't have cared if I had died up there in the air," he continued, "and it was a wonder I didn't. I have plenty of nerve, but that was the worst thing I ever had in my life."

Levi Cohen laughed.

"Yes, my tear, it was funny to see you hung up there like a dried herring. I laughed so much as never was."

"Did you?" sneered Slippery Jim. "I didn't think you were so much amused, especially when he got the diamonds."

"Murdering Abraham!" blurted out Cohen, as he thought of the gems that had been snatched from him at the very moment he believed he had them safe. "I tell you, Slippery Jim, if you was not so thievish, and took them away, we might have them now."

"Think so?" said Slippery Jim, carelessly. "Oh, I don't know."

There was a peculiar twitch in Slippery Jim's left eye that did not escape Mrs. Simpson, although Levi did not observe it.

"Now, about the girl?" said Mrs. Simpson. She had her reasons for not desiring a quarrel between the two worthies at this time.

"There is nothing about the girl, except that I want the padrone to know just where I have him. That's all."

"That's all right, my tear. The padrone will be here. But I hope he won't be violent. It's very bad when a father gets violent, you know."

This was said with a smirk that was possible only to Levi Cohen, and Mrs. Simpson evidently enjoyed it, for she gave him a patronizing smile that made him smirk the more.

"I should advise that you keep out of the way while he is here, then," said Slippery Jim, carelessly.

"But, my tear, I want to see and hear what is done. You know I have an interest in them diamonds."

"You can keep out of sight and still see and hear everything, can't you?" asked Jim, meaningly.

"Vell, yes, but suppose I should want to take part in the conversation?"

"You can't. That's all."

"No, deary. Let Slippery Jim manage it, and he'll get the diamonds and make a good bargain, too."

"But there is von thing I don't understand, and that is how we are to get the diamonds from the Splicer," persisted Cohen.

"There are many things you can't understand, Levi. Git out of this, and fall into your other togs. D'yer hear?"

Levi Cohen seemed to have lost most of the arrogance that usually distinguished him, and now, when Slippery Jim told him in a peremptory way to do a certain thing, he obeyed without question.

He disappeared into a side room, that was in fact little more than a closet, and when he emerged, a few minutes later, it was in the costume of a Chinaman, with a wig that bore a long pigtail, in which he was first introduced to the reader.

At this moment a bell rang in the outer room, and Cohen leaped into the ironing table like a jack-in-the-box, pulling the cover into place after him.

The bell rang again after a short pause, and again a little later, as if the person ringing it were impatient.

"All ready, Levi?" asked Slippery Jim.

"All ready," came the reply from Levi Cohen, muffled by the covering of the ironing table.

Slippery Jim went deliberately to the door and opened it, and then opened the street door, with much shooting back of bolts and turning of keys in rusty locks.

No sooner was the door opened than Charlie Ling, who had been leaning against it, tumbled into the hall, head over heels.

"Ow! Me muchee hurtee!" he squeaked, as he sat on the floor, and rubbed his head.

Slippery Jim gave him a kick, and held the door as the padrone marched in.

He was about to close it, but was stopped by a tall gaunt female, with a small hat perched upon her black hair, and a dress of peculiar, foreign fashion drawn around her shapeless figure. She was not a handsome woman, and her looks were not improved by an awful squint, that drew her eyes almost to the back of her nose, and the fact that she was racked by a cough that compelled her to keep a large red handkerchief over her mouth, and that twisted her face into most horrible contortions.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said Slippery Jim, standing in the doorway. "Who do you want to see?"

The padrone placed his hand on Slippery Jim's shoulder, and pulled him back.

"Hush! That is my sister, from Italia. She come here yesterday. She take care of my Marcia after this. You understand?"

Slippery Jim was about to offer some remonstrance, but the sister coughed her way into the hall, and now sat herself on a chair in the laundry, coughing violently, and rocking herself to and fro, as if she were in great pain.

"Why didn't you leave her at home?" asked Slippery Jim.

"Santa Maria! I dida. But she come out, and finda that I go here, and she comea too. Whata coulda I do?"

The padrone shrugged his shoulders, inquiringly, and the other saw that nothing could be done now, when the woman was already in the room.

"But we want to talk private business?" he objected.

"Wella, we leavea her outa here, and she nota bother."

"Yes, and let Charlie Ling stay with her, to keep her company," suggested Mrs. Simpson.

"Come out of this, Charlie," ordered Slippery Jim.

"Allee lightee! Me comee!" agreed Charlie Ling, cheerfully.

He took the lady's arm and led her to another seat in a corner, where she could see what was going on behind the screen, and might perhaps hear, if she were blessed with good hearing.

"Not there, you yellow brute!" growled Slippery Jim. "She will be in a draught there."

Slippery Jim frowned significantly at Charlie Ling, but that innocent individual did not take the hint. Instead he smiled complacently upon the padrone's sister, and composed himself for a pleasant tete-a-tete, apparently.

"Take a seat here, madam," he said, as politely as he could in his present frame of mind, and he placed a chair with its back to the window, and a long way from the screen.

The lady arose, still coughing, and accidentally tripped Charlie Ling as she passed him, so that he measured his length on the floor.

This was such a usual thing for the Chinaman that he did not pay much attention to it, but picked himself up, and took his position in front of her, as if nothing remarkable had happened.

In the mean time, the padrone had bowed stiffly to Mrs. Simpson, and was walking toward the ironing table at the back of the screen.

"Don'ta trouble witha my sister. She alla righta. Aren't you alla righta?"

But Margherita's cough was so bad that she could not answer, and the padrone

simply beckoned to Slippery Jim to come behind the screen, satisfied that his sister would be all right.

"Nowa, you tella me whata you havea to say, eh?"

"Yes."

"Anda Mrs. Simpson? She knowa something abouta eet?"

"Yes."

At this moment the cough of Margherita was so violent that the Chinaman was obliged to slap her on the back, which kindness she repaid with a shove that sent him across the room and against a rocking chair, which he overturned.

If you have ever fallen over a rocking chair, you know that it is the most awkward article of furniture in existence to fall over. Charlie Ling became mixed up with the rockers, got one of his hands through the back railings, and cracked his shins on various portions of the chair till he howled.

"Shut up, you blamed heathen!" commanded Slippery Jim, as he made a dive at Ling, who escaped it by plunging head first into the lap of Margherita.

She took the poor fellow by the neck and swung him against the door, where he sat on the floor, the picture of dismay and pain.

"Cuss that fellow! I want to get this business in some sort of shape," growled Slippery Jim, as he resumed his seat behind the screen.

"Wella, get to worka," said the padrone, impatiently.

"The point is just this, padrone. I have the Wickworth diamonds, or know where I can get them."

Mrs. Simpson nodded blandly, in acquiescence.

"Where are they?" asked the padrone.

"I'll tell you when we have settled the bargain. You and I know that until the Wickworth diamonds are returned to their owner there can be no settlement upon Marcia."

"You talka vera freely about my Marcia."

"Yes, that is what I mean to do. Now, if I let you get the Wickworth diamonds, will you give your consent to my marriage with Marcia?"

The padrone arose from his chair, his swarthy face becoming crimson with anger, while his ponderous fist was raised, as if he would beat out the brains of the other.

"No!" he thundered. "A thousand timea, no!"

Margherita was here seized with a fit of coughing that drowned anything that Slippery Jim might be saying, although his lips were moving so actively that it was evident he was saying something.

At last, in a pause of the barking of the unfortunate lady, Slippery Jim was heard to inquire:

"Do you mean that?"

Strangely enough, the padrone's mood seemed to have changed all in a moment, for he said, in mild tones:

"Wella, let me thinka about it."

"Certainly, padrone. That's perfectly reasonable," put in Mrs. Simpson, in her bland tones.

"You wanta to marry my Marcia—my leetle girl?"

"Yes."

"And if I givea you my consenta, you givea me the Wickworth diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Why you wanta to marry my leetle girl? You lovea her, eh?"

"Most certainly I do," answered Jim, in a very cool manner.

"That the only reason you wanta to marry her? You nota thinka she will be richa some day?"

The padrone looked straight into the eyes of Slippery Jim as he asked this, but the young man was not disconcerted. He returned the gaze without flinching, and answered:

"I know she will be rich some day, and I want to share part of her wealth. But I love her, too."

"Jima Slider, you are a wonderful fellow, and you talka very plain to me, when you know I could senda you to the peni-

tentiary for life, if I wasa to tella all I know."

"Not much. I have found out a few things about you the last few days, and if I went to the penitentiary, you would have to go too. But that doesn't matter. Do I get Marcia on the terms I offer?"

"You willa give me the Wickworth diamonds?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"The day I am married. Just before the justice or the preacher begins the ceremony, and when I am sure it will go through. I am not taking any chances on you, padrone!"

"You willa keepa your word?"

"Of course I will. I will satisfy you that I can deliver the goods before the marriage."

"Wella, then, I—I—I—consent!"

Mrs. Simpson and Slippery Jim exchanged glances of triumph, and Margherita, in the other part of the laundry, coughed so hard that Charlie Ling took the risk of punching her back, till she gave him another of her hard shoves, and almost knocked him down again.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARGHERITA GETS MAD.

For a minute or two after the padrone had wrung this consent from his soul, Margherita continued to cough, in a series of screams, barks and wheezes that was very distressing.

"Confound that woman!" growled Jim. "What's the matter with her, padrone?"

"Can't she take something for it?"

"She vera bada," answered the padrone, but not moving toward her.

"I have a cough-drop here. Give her one of these."

Mrs. Simpson took from her pocket a package of ordinary cough-drops, such as are sold at the street corners, and, as she noticed that the padrone looked at them suspiciously, she placed two in her mouth and ate them.

Charlie Ling saw that there was something to eat, and came forward at once. Mrs. Simpson handed him the package, and he put three or four of the lozenges in his mouth as he walked over to where Margherita was still alternately coughing and gasping.

She looked at the Chinaman, and feebly pointed to her mouth. The Chinaman took a lozenge out of the package and offered it to her, but she still pointed to her mouth, and Charlie Ling placed it inside, at the same time putting in a great deal of his thumb and finger.

The next instant he squealed like a dying pig, at the same time performing a wild dance.

"What's the matter with you now?" demanded Slippery Jim.

Charlie Ling only squealed the louder, and his dance became more active than ever.

"Take your finger out of her mouth," said Mrs. Simpson. "You are hurting the lady."

"Me can'tee takee it out. She hurt me!" screamed the Chinaman.

Margherita coughed loudly, and the Chinaman took his hand away from her mouth and ran to the other end of the room, where he buried his head in a pile of soiled linen and moaned pitifully.

Margherita coughed again, but Slippery Jim was inclined to suspect that she was laughing as well as coughing, and he began to wish that he had insisted upon her staying outside.

"Now, Slippera Jima, I wanta to know where my Marcia is."

"What do you mean?"

"I meana that you tooka her away from the restaurant. Thata all!"

"You are a funny old duck," declared Slippery Jim, with an uneasy smile.

"I nota care whether I a ducka or a goosea. I wanta to know where my leetle girl."

"The truth is, padrone, I know where she is, but I do not care to tell you till it is time for me to marry her."

Margherita's cough was bad again.

The padrone was evidently about to make some savage reply to the declaration of Slippery Jim, but the cough of his sister turned his thoughts into another channel, and he remarked, instead:

"My poor sister. Her cough is vera bada."

"Can't we have the ceremony performed to-day?" asked Slippery Jim. "Then I will produce the diamonds, and everything will be comfortable. What do you say?"

"Where are the diamonds?"

"I have them where I can get them. Don't you worry about them."

"No, deary. I know he has them all right. You needn't worry about them."

"Now, see here, Slippery Jima. I know you have nota the diamon' at all. Buta all you havea beena saying is a bluff."

"Padrone, you don't know what you are talking about."

"Yes, I do, anda I tella you that you have nota the Wickworth diamon'."

"Who has them then?"

The padrone arose from his chair, and smiling in the face of Jim Slider and Mrs. Simpson, answered, quietly:

"I have!"

Slippery Jim started up, and the padrone drew a knife and held it ready for prompt action.

Slippery Jim smiled, contemptuously.

"Put away your knife, padrone. I don't want to take your diamonds from you."

"Wella, then, sitta down. I don't you trusta when you standa up."

"I don't trust you, either sitting or standing," was Slippery Jim's retort.

The two men seated themselves, and Margherita created a diversion by coughing like a stableful of broken winded horses.

"Stop that confounded woman's coughing somehow," exclaimed Slippery Jim, impatiently. "It's impossible to do any business with a row like that in the room."

"Give her a drink of water, Charlie Ling," suggested Mrs. Simpson.

"With some arsenic in it!" added Slippery Jim, under his breath.

"No, I don't want arsenic," said Margherita, faintly, as she burst into another paroxysm of coughing.

"Now, you give me my leetle girl, and I may tella you where I have the diamonds."

Slippery Jim was smiling sarcastically, and Mrs. Simpson looked from one to the other, as if she could not understand what it all meant.

"Then do you mean to say that you go back on your bargain?" asked Slippery Jim.

"I dida nota makea a bargain," replied the padrone. "I wanted to see whata you have to say. Now, I mean to havea my leetle girl before I go. You know thata you cannot foola with me, Raphael Martini, and I havea leta you go as far as you cana."

Slippery Jim's brow grew black as he saw that the padrone meant what he said, and he was about to make some angry remark when Margherita coughed again, as loudly as ever.

"I think you are mistaken, deary," put in Mrs. Simpson, smilingly. "The young lady left my house of her own accord, and I am as anxious to know where she is as any one."

"She was broughta to your house by this rascal, anda he knows where she is now."

"Now, deary, don't get excited," remonstrated Mrs. Simpson, sweetly. "It was not Slippery Jim only who brought her here. What about the other two men?"

"They were employed by this fellow, as you knowa. They are nota worth considering. I can fixa them at any time."

"Why don't you look to them for your Marcia?" suggested Mrs. Simpson, while Slippery Jim grinned.

That grin was too much for the padrone! He threw himself upon the young man, with knife uplifted, and it was only by the swift interposition of Mrs. Simpson, who displayed more activity than

might have been expected, that an ugly, stab for Slippery Jim was prevented.

She pushed the padrone away, and wrested the knife from his hand, with mingled strength and dexterity that surprised him, although he had known her for a long time, and was aware that she possessed a reputation as an athlete, in spite of her sex.

"Well, padrone, if we cannot do any business, there is no use in keeping you here. You can cail later in the day, if you think better of it, and remember that I will produce the diamonds when we are ready to go on with the marriage ceremony."

The padrone clenched his fists, and looked from one to the other of his tormentors like a hunted tiger.

"My Marcia! My leetle girl!" he groaned.

"Yes, and your little girl will be all ready for the ceremony, too. I'll take care of that," said Mrs. Simpson, with her pleasant smile, as she dropped an old-fashioned curtsy.

The padrone seemed about to speak, but another fit of coughing from Margherita drowned anything he might have said, and Charlie Ling, who had been listening to the conversation with open mouth, rushed over to the patient, and patted her on the back dutifully, to which she responded by aiming a blow at him, as before.

"Not muchee!" yelled Charlie Ling, as he skipped out of her way. "I watchee for you, allee samee, Margherita!"

Something like a chuckle of amusement seemed to proceed from Margherita, but, as she continued to cough hard, it is probable that the chuckle was only a part of the cough.

"Open the door, Charlie Ling," commanded Slippery Jim.

"Allee lightee! But I dontee thinkee they wantee to go outee yet!"

"Do as I tell you!" shouted Jim, fiercely.

"Stopa where you are!" commanded the padrone, with equal ferocity, as he snatched up his knife, that Mrs. Simpson had laid upon the table.

"What's the use, padrone, if we cannot do any business?"

"But we can do business."

"All right. I'm agreeable. Is it a go about Marcia?"

"Never minda about thata. I'm going to show thata you are a liar—a liar!"

Again Slippery Jim moved involuntarily, as if to resent this insult, and again he restrained himself and smiled contemptuously, as he asked, quietly:

"How will you do it?"

"By showing you the Wickworth diamonds."

"Indeed?"

"Yesa, I willa show thema to you."

"Good! Show them to me!"

"Te-he!" squealed Charlie Ling.

Margherita coughed, and Charlie Ling started toward her to pat her back, but stopped when she stopped coughing.

"Do you wanta to see the diamon'?"

"Certainly," answered Slippery Jim, grinning.

"Of course he does, deary," added Mrs. Simpson.

The padrone turned toward the woman, who was wheezing and coughing at the other end of the room, and beckoning with his finger, called:

"Margherita!"

Margherita, still coughing, came slowly forward, and stood, with her red handkerchief to her mouth, looking cross-eyed at Slippery Jim and Mrs. Simpson.

Jim Slider could not repress a smile at the grotesque-looking object, and Charlie Ling was so struck by the comicality of her expression that he narrowly escaped a kick from Slippery Jim for laughing too loudly.

"Margherita, showa hima the diamon'."

The woman, fumbled in her dress, and brought out the chamois-leather bag that has figured so often in these pages, and laid it on the table, but still holding it.

The padrone looked triumphantly at Slippery Jim.

"Nowa, are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied nothing," said Slippery Jim. "That is only the bag. Where are the diamonds?"

"Ina the bag."

"Yes, in the bagee, allee samee!"

"Shut up!" and a wet cloth that happened to be on the table was slapped in Charlie Ling's face.

"Show me the diamonds. Then I may believe you."

Margherita had another fit of coughing and held the bag hugged close to her chest until the paroxysm was over.

The padrone looked suspiciously at Jim and Mrs. Simpson.

"You goa further away froma the table, then."

"Certainly," said Slippery Jim. "I didn't think you would trust me with in reach of them."

"I wouldn't," was the padrone's laconic retort.

Slippery Jim stepped back from the table opposite the padrone and Margherita, and then the padrone looked meaningfully at Mrs. Simpson.

"Suspect me too, deary? Well, I didn't think it of you."

But the padrone was proof against the blandishments of the motherly Mrs. Simpson, and she had to retire by the side of Jim Slider.

"Geta outa of thata, Charlie Ling!"

He accompanied this admonition to the Chinaman with a shove, to which Margherita added another, and poor Charlie Ling brought up against the wall with a bang that might have hurt him if he were not so used to being thrown against walls and other hard substances.

"Now, padrone, where are the diamonds?"

Margherita fastened her red handkerchief in such a way that it would still cover her mouth, probably to keep the air from her lungs, and then slowly produced the chamois-leather bag.

"Pour thema out, Margherita," said the padrone.

She untied the mouth of the bag, and poured out—a handful of little pieces of granite.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Slippery Jim.

"That's funny," giggled Mrs. Simpson.

As for Charlie Ling, for once he did not laugh. Instead, he stood with mouth wide open, looking from one to the other, in intense astonishment.

It was no doubt lucky for the Chinaman that he did not indulge in his usual "Te-he!" for the padrone would have driven his knife into him surely in the first burst of his rage.

"Seem to have missed the combination somehow, eh?" sneered Slippery Jim.

Even as he spoke, the red handkerchief dropped from Margherita's mouth, and the funny bonnet, with the black hair, was thrown off together, while the eyes came straight, and a mustache appeared where the handkerchief had hidden it.

"The Splicer!" gasped Slippery Jim.

"Yes, the Splicer, or Hezekiah Dodds! Which you like?" yelled the transformed Margherita. "And he's going to have those diamonds, Slippery Jim, right now!"

CHAPTER XXII.

INNOCENT CHARLIE LING.

The detective still wore his quaint black dress, which gave him a strange appearance, now that the bonnet and wig were off, and his mustache was strongly in evidence.

He had not drawn any weapon, but stood, with his hands leaning upon the top of the table, looking keenly at Jim and Mrs. Simpson.

He had been fooled by the slick gentleman so properly known as Slippery Jim, and he was determined to retrieve himself by having the diamonds or putting an end to Jim's career as a crook right there and then.

When Slippery Jim had contrived to change the diamonds for the worthless fragments of granite he could not tell, but certainly the trick had been done cleverly as well as effectively.

So far as he knew, the diamonds had never left his pocket, and he had repeatedly put his hand to the outside of his coat to make sure that they were safe.

Yet now he found that he had been nursing these pieces of stone, while the diamonds had been taken away, and were even now hidden he did not know where, although he was morally sure that Slippery Jim had them somewhere.

The detective looked at the bag as it lay on the table before him, and he saw that certain little marks on the chamois bag had been duplicated on this imitation.

"It must have been done beforehand, in preparation for the trick that was afterwards carried out, and I hadn't sense enough to see it. Why, it is an insult to my understanding as a detective. I must get those diamonds right away, or I'm no good," he reflected. "Why, I'll allow myself to be done up by a green goods man next."

Most likely the detective's thoughts were reflected in his face, for the padrone was observing him with a supercilious smile that indicated his contempt for the detective's ability, as well as rage over the miscarriage of the scheme to beat Slippery Jim at his own game by showing him that the diamonds were in the possession of the Splicer.

"Well, padrone, you haven't the diamonds, after all, have you?"

There was a most irritating ring in Slippery Jim's tones, and the detective, who did not often allow his equanimity to be disturbed, was unable to prevent a movement of annoyance and a twitch of his face that made him squint almost as badly as when he was impersonating Margherita, with the very bad cough.

Slippery Jim had recovered somewhat from his astonishment at finding the detective in the guise of the padrone's sister, and his usual effrontery asserted itself as he smiled at the discomfited Splicer.

The detective was not disposed to waste time, however. He felt that he had the best of the situation, with only Slippery Jim and Mrs. Simpson to oppose him and the padrone, even supposing that the lady should take part in the controversy, which he doubted.

As for Charlie Ling, he was the tool of any one that took him in charge, and he was as much under the control of Hezekiah and the padrone now as he had been the creature of Levi Cohen the day before.

That Slippery Jim had the diamonds he had no doubt, but he knew the cunning of the fellow too well to suppose for a moment that he was carrying them about with him.

"Slippery Jim," he said, quietly, dropping into his farmer dialect naturally, "I've a gol durned good mind to belt you in the mouth fer yer ornary meanness, but, by gum, I don't think ez you're worth it."

Slippery Jim smiled, and the detective continued:

"Ez it is, I'll jist give you a chance to squar' up about them there jewels, an' let yer go."

"Oh, you will? How very kind!" returned Slippery Jim, sneeringly. "Where will you let me go?"

"I'll let you go away. That's what I mean. I came here prepared to take yer, an' I'll do it unless ye behave decent."

"Allee samee thatee the way to talkee," burst from Charlie Ling.

"Shuta up!" growled the padrone, looking for something to throw at the Chinaman, who had prudently hidden himself behind a big chair, however.

"You can't take me, and I'll produce the diamonds when I am just about to be married to Marcia. Those are my terms, and I won't listen to anything else."

There was a bold defiance in Slippery Jim's tones that could not be mistaken, and the detective did not wait for anything more.

While standing by the table, the detective had allowed the black gown of Margherita to drop from him, and now stood in his suit of homespun as Hezekiah Dodds, save that the gray whiskers were absent and he wore his own dark mustache,

which, as Margherita, he had hidden with the red handkerchief.

With a smothered cry of rage Hezekiah sprang upon Slippery Jim, and had placed one handcuff upon him before he realized what Hezekiah meant to do.

Then the latent devilry in Slippery Jim's nature sprang into being as he wrestled with the detective.

The men were evenly matched as to strength and agility, and it was a terrific struggle for a few seconds. But the padrone was there, and he was not disposed to be an idle spectator.

With a cry of "Marcia!" he rushed to the detective's assistance, and in a moment the two handcuffs were on the wrists of Slippery Jim, and the padrone was searching his pockets with feverish haste.

It is perhaps needless to say that the diamonds were not there. Jim would not be likely to let them remain in his pockets, where there would be every chance of their being found by the enemy.

"Wherea the diamon'?" yelled the padrone, while the detective kept his eye on Mrs. Simpson to see that she did not try to turn the tables against him by any sudden and treacherous onslaught.

"The diamonds are safe, I tell you," was Slippery Jim's sullen response; "and they'll be safe till I get little Marcia."

"My Marcia? Where isa she?" asked the padrone, all thought of the gems vanishing as the picture of his little girl in the hands of these rascals arose before his mental vision.

"She's as safe as the diamonds," was Jim's irritating reply.

"Well, I'll soon find out where she is," put in the detective, who had been thinking while the padrone and Jim were conversing.

With a sudden movement the detective twitched off the cover of the table and peered into the opening that led to the cellar. Then he leaped upon the edge of the table, and kicked viciously at something round that he could just distinguish in the gloom.

There was a howl of pain, for the something round was nothing more or less than Levi Cohen's head.

"Look out for Jim, and I'll attend ter this feller," cried Hezekiah, as he dragged Levi to the surface, and, with a superhuman effort, dropped him upon the floor outside of the table.

"What you doing with me, my tear?" asked Levi, as he shook himself together and looked around him with an expression of childlike innocence.

"Te-he!" laughed Charlie Ling.

Then there was a scuffle, and the padrone, neatly tripped, fell full length on the floor, as Slippery Jim, with one of his handcuffs dangling loose, jumped inside the table and disappeared.

The attention of the detective was taken momentarily from his own prisoner, and Levi was quick to take advantage of it. He tore himself loose from the detective's grasp and ran for the door.

It should be remembered that Levi knew the ways of the place, and he had the two doors unfastened and was on Mott street before the detective or Charlie Ling could prevent his escape.

Meanwhile there was the sound of hurried movement in the cellar, and it was evident that Slippery Jim would get away if he were not promptly followed.

"Come, padrone! It is for Marcia!" shouted the detective, as he leaped into the table and dropped to the cellar.

"Yes, for my leetle girl!" responded the padrone, and he followed the detective.

Mrs. Simpson had been watching these hurried movements with some amusement, and now, when the padrone disappeared, she smiled as she drew from her pocket the bag of diamonds about which there had been so much trouble.

"If I were a dishonest woman now," she mused, "I might take these to Chicago and get my price for them. But I cannot go back on Jim. No, I can't go back on him!"

She replaced the bag in her pocket, and then, for the first time, realized that she was not alone.

Charlie Ling was sitting in the chair that had been occupied by Margherita, apparently fast asleep.

"Confound that fellow! I'd forgotten all about him. I wonder whether he really is asleep."

She stepped softly over to him, and looked straight into his face for over a minute.

At the end of that time, as she had expected, his eyes opened slowly, and just enough for him to see that she was there, and then closed again, while a loud snore issued from him.

"Charlie Ling!" she said, sharply.

The Chinaman did not move. He was utterly unconscious to all appearance.

"Charlie Ling!"

This time she accompanied the calling of his name with a slap on the shoulder, and he started up with a most innocent expression of drowsiness, that would have deceived any one not accustomed to the cunning of the child-like Mongolian.

"Whatee you wantee?" asked Charlie, rubbing his eyes.

"I'm going home. You go with me."

"Yes. But where the padrone and the Splicee?"

"Never mind about them. I want to go home now."

"Allee lightee. Me go."

The Chinaman looked curiously at her, and once accidentally brushed against her dress, where he knew her pocket to be, as a light shone in his eyes, as if he had satisfied himself about something.

He opened the doors, and fastened them as well as he could from the outside, and then obediently followed Mrs. Simpson on her way to the West street restaurant.

They walked as far as Broadway, and then Charlie Ling remembered that he had forgotten his hat in the Mott street house, and, in spite of Mrs. Simpson's protests, insisted upon going back for it.

"What cunning trick is he up to now?" thought Mrs. Simpson, as she continued her way toward home. "I suppose he won't come back now."

But in this she was mistaken. For, just as she reached the door of her house, and obtained a good sniff of the cheese that was always so loud in the neighborhood, Charlie Ling came running up to her, and even pushed against her in his hurry to be polite and open the door for her.

"You needn't knock me down, Charlie," remonstrated Mrs. Simpson.

"No, me not knockee you down. Me only wantee to open the door."

"Did you see the Splicer or Slippery Jim at the house?"

"No; allee quiet."

"Um! I wonder what will be the end of this? I guess Jim will gain his point. He generally does," she murmured, as she made her way to the basement, and took her seat at her little desk, as if nothing unusual had happened during the morning.

Then she rang an electric bell that stood upon her desk, and almost as if by magic Red the Fox and Swikey stood at her side.

"Swikey, there is a mix-up in Mott street. You and Red go there, and work the plant. Go in the other way, from Doyer street, and bring the girl here. Understand?"

"Dope 'er?" asked Swikey, in a matter-of-fact way.

"No. She will come without that, if you tell her she will find her father here."

"All right. Come on, Red."

"Wait a moment," added Mrs. Simpson, placing her hand on Swikey's shoulder. "If you can get a chance to tip the wink to Jim, tell him he will find her here."

Swikey gave her a wink of intense significance, and, beckoning to Red the Fox with his chin, disappeared.

"Where they going?" asked Charlie Ling, as he stood in front of the desk, smiling cheerfully at Mrs. Simpson.

"None of your business!" was the short reply.

"Mebbee notee! But you can'tee, always tellee, allee samee," was the Chinaman's muttered comment, as he retired to the kitchen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JIM NOT BEATEN YET.

When Hezekiah and the padrone followed Slippery Jim down the hole to the cellar, they followed the path that the detective had been carried on that memorable night when he had been made a prisoner by the gang, including the very man who was now his companion.

Both knew the windings of the place very well, and it was not long before they stood in the room, with its three bunks, in which, it will be remembered, Red the Fox, Swikey, and Charlie Ling were asleep when the detective escaped so cleverly.

A hasty examination of the apartment revealed the fact that it was empty of everything save the meagre furniture.

"Of course," said the detective. "What else did you expect?"

"I expecta nothings. I wanta my Marcia—my leetle girl. I carea nota for the diamond, if we can finda the leetle girl."

The detective raised his eyebrows. It was evident the padrone felt pretty strongly about his girl, when he could talk in this offhand way about the Wickworth gems, so the chances were good for his working earnestly to bring Slippery Jim to time.

While this conversation was transpiring, the detective, who was in the bottom bunk, and was carelessly feeling over the wall, by mere chance touched a small knob, not larger than a pea. Instantly his suspicions were excited, and he was not long in finding out what it meant, and before the padrone realized what was being done, the Splicer had pulled out a large section of the wooden side of the bunk and was stepping through the aperture into darkness.

As he did so he heard Marcia's voice crying faintly:

"Father!"

"Come, padrone!" the detective shouted in excitement. "Marcia is here!"

"Marcia! My Marcia!" cried the Italian, in loving tones, and he instantly followed the detective through the hole, while Hezekiah took out his pocket lamp and lighted it. Then they heard the cry again:

"Father! Father!"

"Eet ees Marcia! Yes—yes, ma child! I s'all come!"

By the light of the lamp they saw that the place they were in was little more than a closet.

This the detective took in with one quick glance, and then his attention was fixed upon a little window, consisting of one pane of ground glass, but up in the wall near the ceiling, opposite to the hole by which they had entered.

The window was too high to reach from the floor, but the detective soon solved that difficulty, for he bounced back into the room behind, where there was a small table. This he seized, and by dint of careful manoeuvring, worked the article through the hole, and placed it under the little window.

As he mounted it, Hezekiah warned the other:

"Don't trouble to watch me, but keep your eye on that hole. Somebody might come in there and do us both up while we are looking at this thing. Slippery Jim ai no baby, yer know!"

The padrone heeded the warning, and took up his station by the side of the hole, his big loaded stick in hand, evidently now ready for any emergency or for any foe.

Leaping lightly upon the table, the Hayseed tried to open the window, but found that the glass was firmly fastened, so there was only one thing to be done, either to break it, or so pull away the frame or casing as to let the pane drop into his hand.

The latter, he instantly decided, was the right thing to do, if it could be done without noise, so as not to alarm those on guard in the room beyond.

No sooner decided on than work commenced, his strong-bladed pocket-knife being the only tool necessary for cutting away the casing.

It did not prove to be a serious job, and

after a few minutes' cutting and prying the pane was so loosened that with a gentle pull the whole square of glass came out in his hands.

Hezekiah then bent over to hand it to the padrone, when a pistol shot rang out in the other room and a bullet whistled through the hole and flattened itself against the brick ceiling.

"Ah! Yer didn't think I wuz goin' ter stand there to be shot at, did yer, Jim?" called out the Hayseed, as he dropped to the floor, out of range of more possible bullets.

"Father!"

It was Marcia's voice, very distinct now that the window was out, and before Hezekiah could restrain him, the padrone had dropped the lantern on the floor, extinguishing it, and was up to the window space looking into the next room!

Then he jumped down, his face crimson with excitement and rage, and his mouth quivering, and ran wildly about the little room, looking for some way of getting to the adjoining apartment.

"I musta getta to her! I musta getta to her!"

The detective jumped upon the table and looked through the opening, and he, too, felt that something must be done.

Marcia was sitting in the middle of the room, and Slippery Jim stood over her, his pistol in his hand, pointed at her, and evidently threatening her with death unless she consented to what he demanded. He did not speak while the detective was looking at him, but evidently he had made some demand or threat, and was waiting for a reply.

Hezekiah stepped from the table, a troubled look upon his countenance, if it could have been discerned in that darkness. He did not believe the girl was in actual danger of death, because Jim would not dare to kill her, and thus jeopardize his own life, but that the scoundrel would do her some bodily harm the detective certainly feared.

Picking up his lamp, the Hayseed crawled through the hole again and made his way to the broken door that led to the room in which he had been confined when found by Charlie Ling and the gang two nights before.

Carefully exploring the long halls and queer-shaped rooms, he at last found himself in front of a door that he did not remember to have seen before. It was a thick oaken affair, as most of the doors were, strong and stubborn; but, open it must, so the two men—for Martini was at his side—placed their shoulders against the barrier with a will.

Steadily the two athletes brought their great strength to bear. There was firm resistance at first, but, almost in a moment, the oaken panels and frame fell forward with a crash and a great deal of dust, while the detective and padrone almost pitched headlong into the room.

A lamp was burning on a table, and by its light they saw that this was the room into which they had peeped from the little window. Moreover, there was the little window itself, with the glass neatly removed, and revealing a black opening.

But the room was unoccupied!

Slippery Jim had again proved his right to that title by disappearing, with the girl, and presumably with the diamonds also.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MRS. SIMPSON'S DIAMONDS.

While the detective had been engaged in his long search for the room Slippery Jim had been anything but idle. Realizing his danger from the detective, and fearing the treachery of the padrone, as he termed it, the wily knave at once left the room, forcing Marcia to take his arm, and, pistol in hand, guiding her through the devious passages to the outer door.

When they reached the dirty little street, with Chinese warehouses, laundries and restaurants on all sides, Marcia recognized Doyer street, and knew that she had left the house on the opposite side from her entrance.

Straight to the other rendezvous Jim led his charge, and once more was inside

The restaurant, with its ever-present smell of cheese. Through this room they passed, direct to the room the girl had occupied before, with the gambling implements and the bedstead piano in their respective positions. The door had been repaired, and when she had been introduced to this her prison, again, she was left alone, and the door fastened outside.

Somewhat to her surprise, she was not disturbed for a long time, and, tired with the excitement of the last few days, she sat in a low rocker and fell fast asleep.

She was awakened by the sound of many voices, raised in anger, and by the glare of lights in her eyes.

When she had entered the room it was daybreak, and, the curtains at the windows being drawn, it was but dimly bright. But now electric lights flashed in her eyes, and she felt as if she were in a very public place.

She looked around to find that she was in the midst of a considerable company as regards numbers. The faro table was in full blast, and Slippery Jim sat at the head of it, dealing cards with the sangfroid of an old gambler.

A dozen men sat around the table, including Levi Cohen, habited as a Chinaman, and Charlie Ling running hither and thither as a waiter.

"Make your bets, gentlemen!" Slippery Jim was saying at intervals, as he kept a watchful eye upon the game, and rattled the chips as occasion required.

No one would have thought he was interested in anything but the game, to see him, and yet there was not a movement in the room, and particularly in the neighborhood of Marcia, that escaped him.

At the roulette wheel Red the Fox was the presiding genius, and Swipey was one of the players, but it was evident to Marcia, with her knowledge of things crooked, that Swipey was a "capper," and was doing his best to assist Red the Fox in cheating the other players, particularly a light-haired chappie, with large spectacles on his nose, and long-tailed coat, who was bending over the wheel, and apparently anxious to win.

So far he was out about fifty dollars, but he was game, for he never spoke, and did not even look up from the time he had sneaked into the room and taken his seat in a business-like way at the table, and bought chips to play against the game.

"Go on, gentlemen! Make your bets while the wheel turns. Any time until the ball stops rolling!" shouted the Fox. Swipey put down a pile of chips on red, and watched the chappie by his side, to see whether he would follow suit.

As Marcia awoke and looked about her, Slippery Jim's eye was upon her, and his hand trembled slightly as he dealt the cards.

Beckoning to Swipey, he assigned him the position at the head of the table, and stepped over to Marcia at once.

"What is all this?" she asked, as she looked about.

"Nothing that need worry you, Marcia," he answered. "This is the regular room for play, and Mrs. Simpson wouldn't stop the game to-night, on your account, although she did it last night. So we had to let you sit there while the game went on."

"Why didn't somebody wake me? Why am I kept here at all?"

"Nobody awoke you, because I wouldn't let them do so, and you are not going home until I have an answer from you about you know what."

Marcia looked around her helplessly, hoping to see one friendly face, but in vain.

"Jim!" she said, after a pause.

"Well?"

"I am going home, and if you want an answer to your question, you must come there. I am sure my father will never say anything to you while you keep me a prisoner and submit me to all these indignities."

"Nonsense! You have not suffered any indignities, and I should like to see the

man that would dare to annoy you in any way while I was by."

Slippery Jim clenched his fists and looked so savagely at the light-haired chappie, who happened to be glancing at him at that moment, that the chappie bet fifty dollars on the black, and won before Red the Fox had time to manipulate the wheel and beat him.

Marcia did not reply, but got up and walked to the door, trusting to the number of people in the room being a protection to her.

But she soon saw that she could not depend upon any one there defending her against Gambler Jim, and made up her mind that she must fight her own battle until her father or the Splicer could come to her assistance.

"Will you let me see my father, so that I can tell what he thinks about this proposition?" asked Marcia.

Jim eyed her for an instant, with a thoughtful brow; then, as if determined to risk something, he said, emphatically: "I'll do it."

"Then my father is here?"

"I didn't say so. But perhaps I can find him," and motioning to Charlie Ling, who opened the door, they proceeded downstairs to the little living room or parlor, at the back of the restaurant, the particular sanctum of the buxom hostess, Mrs. Simpson. She was there, and gave Marcia a smiling welcome.

"Sit down, deary," she said, hospitably. "Here's a nice easy chair by the fire. A fire looks comfortable in the evening, even when it is not very cold. And I dare say you feel chilly after your nice sleep upstairs."

She placed a chair for Marcia, and a large cushion for her feet, and seemed more like a kind, motherly friend of the young girl, than a person who was trying to force her into a distasteful marriage for the sake of profit to herself.

Marcia listened to the old woman's gabble, but was not deceived into thinking that Mrs. Simpson was anything but a dangerous enemy.

Slippery Jim seated himself moodily at a small table against the wall, opposite the fire, and Mrs. Simpson stood near the door, looking from one to the other complacently.

"What are you going to talk about?" asked Mrs. Simpson, as she folded her hands under her ample white apron, and looked patronizingly at the two people with her.

"He has promised that I shall see my father, so that he can express his feeling in the matter of my becoming the wife of Slippery Jim," the girl answered.

"So you shall, deary—so you shall."

Marcia looked at Mrs. Simpson in surprise, for she did not think that the promise of Jim would be so quickly endorsed.

"Bring him in!" ordered the crook, curtly.

Mrs. Simpson, still smiling, stepped into the restaurant, that was deserted now, save for one sleepy waiter, and, as if he had sprung out of the floor, the padrone appeared.

"Father!"

"Marcia!"

These two exclamations were simultaneous, and father and daughter sprang into each other's arms.

Jim looked at them superciliously, and Mrs. Simpson's face beamed with her everlasting smile, as if she were their guardian angel.

"Glad to see her, ain't you, deary?" murmured the old woman.

"Glada? Glada? Ah, my leetle girl—my Marcia!"

The padrone spoke in broken tones, and it would have affected most people to see this rugged, swarthy man, with his record of sternness to thousands of crooks melting into tears over the recovery of his beloved daughter.

"And I am glad to see you again, father," returned Marcia, sobbing with joy.

"Yes, you are my own leetle Marcia!"

"All right! That's good enough," broke

in Jim, rather roughly, for he was tired of this exhibition of feeling. "Let us get to business."

The padrone released Marcia from his embrace, but kept his hand caressingly on her hair.

"I am ready for business. I am waiting for the business, as you know. Now I havea my leetle Marcia, I will talka to you."

"The point of it is just this," began Slippery Jim, as he leaned against the wall, and crossed one foot over the other, carelessly. "I want to marry your daughter. You will not let me have her. I say to you that I will tell you where the Wickworth diamonds are if you will give your consent to the marriage. You want to get the diamonds, because when they are returned to their owner, Leonard Wickworth, Marcia will come into possession of certain property, and will learn who are her parents."

The padrone nodded his head as Slippery Jim proceeded.

"Wella, I know who her parents are, and coulda tella her thata at any time. Buta whata woulda be the use of thata unless she geta her fortune? Besides, she lovea me likea her father, and woulda nota take any other. Would you, my leetle Marcia?"

For answer Marcia clung around his neck.

"That's right, deary! He's a good father," said Mrs. Simpson, patronizingly. "You ought to love him."

There was silence for a few moments, but soon Slippery Jim blurted out:

"Well, padrone, what is it?"

The Italian looked from Slippery Jim to Mrs. Simpson, and then at his daughter, and then back at Slippery Jim, as he gave forth his decision.

"Produce the diamonds in this room, within the next five minutes, and I will give my consent."

Jim tried to be unconcerned, but his voice trembled in spite of himself, as he answered:

"I guess we can do that—eh, Mrs. Simpson?"

"Certainly, deary," was her cheery response.

Marcia had turned white as marble, as she heard herself thus given over to Slippery Jim, the crook, but she had perfect faith in her foster father, and knew that whatever he did would be for what he considered her best interests.

"The diamon'? Where are they?" muttered the padrone, hoarse with excitement.

"Here they are, deary!"

Mrs. Simpson went deeply into her skirts, and from a capacious pocket fished up the chamois leather bag with which the reader is so well acquainted.

"Ah! The diamon'!" ejaculated the Italian, as his dark eyes lighted up, while Marcia turned even paler still.

Slippery Jim leaned forward over the table, as Mrs. Simpson, with provoking deliberation, untied the mouth of the bag, and then allowed the stones to pour forth slowly upon the table.

All were soon in a little pile under the woman's hand, and, as the bag was whisked away, and she saw the stones on the table, the old "fence" gave a shriek, and actually fainted.

The stones were only the chips of granite that Hezekiah Dodds had produced in the Mott street laundry.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW THEY TURNED THE CHAPPIE.

Notwithstanding the astonishment and terrible disappointment of Slippery Jim over this mysterious change in the jewels, the first thing to be done was to restore Mrs. Simpson to consciousness.

A pitcher of cold water and some vinegar from a castor did this, and then it was possible to ask Mrs. Simpson the meaning of this fiasco.

"Did anybody come near you?" asked the astounded Jim.

"No. How could they?" she moaned. "I had them in my pocket all the time, in the laundry, and ever since."

The padrone opened his eyes at this; but, considering the match off, turned to his daughter.

"Comea, Marcia. We go homea. When you ready to tella me something more about the diamon', I comea backa," and taking Marcia under his arm, he walked toward the front door, looking back when half way up the stairs, to say:

"Whena you havea news abouta the diamon', remember to let me know, Jim."

He was about to walk along the hall to the door leading to the street, when a tremendous racket upstairs made him pause.

A door was banged; then there was the sound of many voices, high in anger, muffled by the intervening door, followed by the opening of the door, and the same voices rendered distinct now.

Through the racket could be distinguished the shrill tones of Charlie Ling in remonstrance, interrupted now and then by what seemed to be cuffs and blows; there were bangs and kicks, and the sound of somebody falling upon the floor, which the padrone had no doubt was the Chinaman himself.

"They killa thata poor devil!" exclaimed the padrone. "I musta go and see! You stay here, Marcia, closea to the walla, and you willa be safe," he whispered.

She obeyed his injunction, and kept as close to the wall in the shadow as possible.

Meanwhile the padrone, rushing up the stairs, ran plump into Charlie Ling before he knew it.

"Oh, padronee! Savee me! Savee me!" pleaded the terrified Celestial, clasping the padrone's legs and nearly throwing him down the stairs.

"Letta go!" commanded the padrone, indignantly. "Letta go of my legs. Whata you wanta, eh?"

"The durned yaller brute tried to steal some chips! That's what's the matter!" exclaimed a big fellow, dressed in the extreme of fashion, who was known to the fraternity as Slick John, one of the best confidence men in New York.

"I didn't! I didn't!" declared Charlie Ling.

"I don't believe he did, nuther," put in Red the Fox, as he came across the room, after taking care that all his chips and other paraphernalia were safe.

"No, allee samee Redee know," asserted the Chinaman, hurriedly, only too glad to find that he had a champion in the midst of so many enemies.

"Never mind about that, don't you know. Go on with the game, won't you? I say, go on with the game, don't you know! I think it's awfully jolly!"

It was the light-haired chappie who spoke, and the crowd turned to look at him, as he balanced his gold glasses on his nose and looked at them with aristocratic carelessness.

Thus enjoined, the crowd turned toward the tables again, giving the chappie contemptuous glances; but Red the Fox, believing the chappie had lost about all the money he had, and for some other reason, apparently, sought to fan the flame of dislike.

"That's the mug that stole the chips!" he boldly assumed.

The chappie started, and surveyed Red the Fox through his glasses with an expression of astonishment and anger that made every one in the room laugh.

"That's real mean of you to say such a nawsty thing!" declared the stranger, "and I don't think you are kind at all."

The idea of any one being kind in a gambling house where a "crooked" as well as "square" game was played, was too ludicrous for anything, and the remonstrances were drowned in the roars of laughter.

"Say, Red, you don't mean to say this 'ere cove is a blackleg, do you?" asked Swikey, seriously.

"That's what!"

"Oh, come, I say; this is too bad!" expostulated the chappie, as he looked from one to the other through his glasses, in the hope of seeing a friendly face.

"We can soon settle that," suggested Red.

"How?" asked the padrone, who had stayed to see the end of the dispute.

"Turn him wrong side up, the way they does at the Darby when they ketches a welcher," suggested Swikey.

The suggestion met with general favor, and Swikey, who was still dealing at the faro table, shut down all play there to take a hand in the fun.

"Oh, I say, this isn't right, don'tcher-know!" whined the chappie, in seeming mortal terror.

Swikey and Red the Fox came forward to seize the chappie and turn him over so that he would be standing on his head, the idea being that any chips or coins in his pockets would fall out, and thus it would be seen whether he had appropriated anything not his own.

"If he has any money or chips the mug must have stole them!" declared Red the Fox, loudly.

"Why?" asked the padrone.

Red the Fox turned indignantly, to see who it was that dared to question him in this place, where he was recognized as somebody of consequence, but when he recognized the Italian he answered humbly:

"Well, yer see, padrone, he was cleaned out half an hour ago. So of course he can't have nothin' of his own now."

"Go for him!" cried Swikey.

Slick John, the confidence man, was the first to advance to begin operations.

"Now, Clarence, I'm goin' ter turn yer upside down. You hear me!" he proclaimed.

"Oh, I say, don't do anything violent," begged the chappie.

"Oh, give yer mouth a rest," was John's response, as he placed his heavy hand on the chappie's shoulder.

The crowd laughed in intense enjoyment.

"Oh, I say, won't you let me go?" pleaded the chappie, beseechingly.

"Come here, Swikey," was all that Slick John vouchsafed, in answer to this appeal, and Swikey slouched forward, pushing up his coat cuffs ready for business.

Slick John and Swikey each seized one of the trembling chappie's shoulders.

"Now!" yelled Slick John, "when I say three!"

"All right! Go ahead!" laughed Swikey. "When you say three we'll turn him over."

"One! Two!!"

"Three!" suddenly yelled the chappie.

The yellow-haired dude's fists shot out, one on each side, with the force of two pile-drivers, and the two worthies flew to the opposite ends of the room, and lay in two heaps, wondering what had struck them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE KNOCK-OUT DROPS.

"Swipe him!" yelled Red the Fox, as he saw his two friends knocked out of time. "He took them unawares. I don't allow no such pug as that to run this crib!"

He ran toward the chappie, but suffered the same fate as his companions, and went down in a heap on top of Slick John.

Slippery Jim came in at this moment, just in time to see the chappie knock down Red the Fox, and thinking immediately that it was a trick to rob the "bank," he ran to the chappie, and was about to give him a painful lesson in pugilism, when he got one himself.

The chappie was equally clever with either hand, and put his left fist in Slippery Jim's face with such effect that he quickly lay on top of Red the Fox and Slick John.

But no matter how good a boxer a man may be, he can hardly stand against a dozen others, and the chappie evidently recognized this plain fact, for, as he knocked down Slippery Jim, he made a bolt for the door and ran into the padrone.

"Whata you doing, eh?" began the padrone, angrily, when he suddenly stopped and went out on the landing with the chappie.

"It's all right now, padrone! I think I know where the diamonds are, and I'll prove it in a few minutes!"

"Where shall we go? I have Marcia down stairs," whispered the padrone.

"All the better. Come!"

The two hastened down stairs, and met Marcia, still standing against the wall. Not delaying a moment, they entered the restaurant, and thence into the little room behind it, where Mrs. Simpson was still suffering from the effects of her fainting fit and trying to account for the loss of the diamonds.

The detective closed the door behind him when he entered, and came to business without any waste of words.

"Mrs. Simpson, I believe you have the Wickworth diamonds in your possession, and I want them. I am an officer of the law, as you know, and I will not submit to any more nonsense."

The detective had dropped all his dialect, and now spoke in a plain, straightforward manner, like the ready man of business.

Mrs. Simpson looked at him for a moment in perplexity, until he lifted his yellow wig, when she recognized him, and listened quietly to what he had to say.

"I am sorry, Splicer, that you should have wrong information, but I have not got the Wickworth diamonds."

"Don't lie, Mrs. Simpson, or it will be the worse for you. If you want to be closed up here, you will try to deceive me. If you want to be allowed to carry on your business, so long as you do it in a half-way decent manner, you will give up those diamonds."

The old woman looked at him curiously, and then said:

"Splicer, I haven't got the Wickworth diamonds."

"You had them."

"Yes, I had them."

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know."

"You will lie, eh? Very well; I will take you to the police station on Church street, and have you searched by the matron."

"I tell you I haven't got them!"

"They are in your pocket."

"No, they were in my pocket," corrected Mrs. Simpson.

The detective was evidently out of patience, and was about to seize her and drag her to the police station, when she exclaimed:

"Ask the padrone! He knows!"

The detective turned quickly, and was surprised to see that the padrone's face wore a half-smile.

"What do you know about it, padrone? Do you know where these diamonds are? You haven't been trying to play any double game on me, have you?"

"I guessa the woman speaka the truth, splicea. Tell him, Mrs. Simpson."

"Here are the diamonds that I found in my pocket just now, when I wanted to show them to the padrone."

She pulled open a drawer in the table, and brought forth the chips of granite and the chamois-leather bag.

The detective could not repress a naughty word.

"Curse this thing! What does it mean?"

The padrone shrugged his shoulders and Mrs. Simpson elevated her eyebrows.

"You had the real diamonds in your pocket some time ago, did you?"

"Yes. They were there when I was over in the laundry on Mott street, but you didn't know it."

"No. If I had, my trouble would have ended there, because I would have taken them and put a stop to this fooling," declared the detective, hotly.

"Well, it is a terrible loss to me," sighed Mrs. Simpson.

"How?"

"How? Because I should have got a nice little sum out of Marcia and the padrone when Slippery Jim and Marcia were married."

"Blackmail, eh?" observed the detective.

"If you like; although I don't care to

use such an ugly word," answered Mrs. Simpson, with a quiet smile.

"Well, padrone, it looks as if we should have to go all over the ground again," said the detective, wearily.

He threw himself into a chair and thought for a few moments, and was deep in a reverie when some one appeared in the outer room and made a sign to Mrs. Simpson.

The person was Slippery Jim, and Mrs. Simpson understood at once that the sign meant to keep the detective in the room for the present.

"Will you have a cup of coffee, Splicer? You know my coffee is good, and I am sure it will be refreshing to you after all your labors and disappointments."

The detective looked at her curiously, and nodded.

"Charlie Ling!" she called, and the Chinaman stood before her.

"Hello! I thought you were upstairs a minute or two ago," observed the detective sharply.

Charlie Ling looked at the yellow wig on the table, and then at the detective's dress, which was that in which he had seen the chappie upstairs, and a light evidently broke upon him, for he chuckled as if he were enjoying a good joke.

"Get a cup of coffee, Charlie Ling," commanded the old woman, "and mind it is strong!"

There was a peculiar emphasis upon the word "strong" that did not escape the detective, although he made no sign, and he sat at the table, allowing the chips of granite to sift through his fingers in an idle way, as if there were nothing in the vicinity to engage his attention, and as if his thoughts were far away.

"Marcia, my leetle girl, we willa go homea," suggested the padrone, as he saw that the girl's head was drooping in very weariness.

"Yes, father," she said, obediently, as she arose from her chair.

But the hospitable Mrs. Simpson would not hear of her going without partaking of a cup of coffee, too.

"You need it, deary, I'm sure, after all the excitement. And even if the scheme has fallen through, so that Jim cannot have you for a bride, that is no reason why we should not be good friends, as we always have been."

"Yes, I always thought you were my friend, Mrs. Simpson," answered the girl, sadly.

"And so I am still, Marcia, as you will see some day."

Charlie Ling came stumbling across the restaurant with two cups of coffee on a tray. The large room was not very light, and when the Chinaman had nearly reached the door of the little room, Slippery Jim, who was standing back in the shadow, poured some colorless fluid out of a small bottle he held in his hand into each cup, and sent the Chinaman on without even stopping him for an instant.

Did the detective see this proceeding?

Perhaps he did, for, as Charlie Ling set the tray down on the table, the Splicer contrived clumsily to upset both cups and throw down the tray as well.

"Confound it! I'm awfully awkward!" he said, apologetically. "I'm afraid Charlie Ling will have to get some more coffee, or we must go without it."

But Mrs. Simpson would not hear of their going home without some coffee, and sent Charlie Ling to the kitchen to get two more cups.

"Well, I'll go with him, to make sure that he does not spill them this time. I did it the last time, and now it is his turn, you know," suggested the detective.

He walked across the restaurant, and saw the Chinaman draw the coffee from the big steaming urn. Then he watched the milk put in, and kept his eye on Charlie Ling as he carried the tray across the big room to Mrs. Simpson's private retreat.

"There's been no knock-out drops put into that coffee, at all events," muttered the detective, "and it will be safe to drink it. It is a fact that Mrs. Simpson makes the best coffee in New York, and I don't

mean to be beaten out of it to-night by Slippery Jim or any one else."

From which remarks it may be assumed that the Splicer did see Jim pour the liquid into the other two cups, after all.

"What do you intend to do next about the Wickworth diamonds, Splicer?" asked Mrs. Simpson, as the detective sat, stirring the sugar into his coffee.

"I don't know yet," he answered. "It might not be a bad idea to put the whole gang in jail on suspicion, and search them at my leisure. I may do that yet."

"You don'ta mean me, too, do you, Splicea?" asked the padrone, anxiously. "I have been square with you in all this thinga."

"What about that piece of paper you took from me two or three nights ago in Mott street, when you and the gang thought you had me dead to rights?"

"Whata paper?"

"Look in your pocketbook, padrone, and perhaps you will find it. And don't try the innocent dodge. Leave that to Charlie Ling."

"Whatee thatee about Charlie Lingee? Me allee lightee!"

"Then keep away from me, if you want to continue so," warned the detective, significantly.

"I don'ta know whata paper you meana," declared the Italian.

"Look in your pocketbook, I tell you."

The padrone obeyed, and drew forth the piece of paper peculiarly perforated, that, it will be remembered, was found inside the detective's neckcloth when he came so near being a victim in the underground retreat in Mott street.

The detective took the paper, looked at it to make sure that it was all right, and placed it in his own pocketbook.

"Whata is thata?"

"It is something that deeply concerns the happiness of Marcia, and that I will explain to you when we get the Wickworth diamonds."

"If evera we do."

"We will," assumed Jack Bowles, confidently. "Because I must have them before I go back to Chicago, and I know I can depend upon your help, now that you know how much they concern Marcia's future life."

As the detective spoke, he took up his cup of coffee and sipped it with an expression of intense enjoyment. Then he held it up playfully to Marcia, and said:

"Marcia, let's drink to the speedy recovery of the Wickworth diamonds—shall we?"

"With all my heart," was her laughing response.

She and the detective each drained their cups to the bottom, and before they could put them down, fell back in their chairs, unconscious.

At the same moment Slippery Jim came into view, holding a pistol to the padrone's forehead, to prevent his raising any alarm.

"The knock-out drops have worked well, eh?" he remarked, grimly, as he looked from the detective to Marcia.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CIPHER LETTER.

Slippery Jim took charge of the situation now, and briefly ordered the disposal of the girl and the detective.

"Take her to your room, and let her stay with you all night. She will be all right by the morning, if she gets a good sleep," he said to Mrs. Simpson.

She took the girl up in her powerful arms, and carried her into her bedroom, that opened out of her private parlor, and then Jim turned his attention to the detective.

"Carry him upstairs to the playing room. The gang have all gone now, and he can sleep in that piano bed. I will settle some business I have with him in the morning," he muttered. "Take hold of one end of him, padrone, and you the other, Charlie Ling."

The detective was deposited on the bed, and the door of his room locked. Slippery Jim, the padrone and the Chinaman then went down to the restaurant, and met Swikey and Red the Fox, who

had, indeed, been there all the time, but out of sight of the Splicer and the Italian.

Into Mrs. Simpson's parlor the padrone was ushered, and, as he tried to hear whether Marcia was making any sound in the adjoining room, Jim Slider slapped him upon the back familiarly, and uttered a jarring laugh.

"Funny, isn't it, padrone, that I always get the best of you? I'm thinking that you are cornered now, and that the best thing you can do is to give in, and let me marry Marcia."

"Wherea the diamon?"

There was no mistaking the irony in the Italian's tones, and Jim scowled, as he replied:

"I'll get the diamonds. I suspect where they are, and when it suits me I'll find them. But suppose I don't choose to find the diamonds, padrone? What then?"

At this moment the padrone thought he heard a cry from his girl.

He sprang at the door, and shook it furiously in his attempts to open it, while his swarthy face flushed like a sunset in a summer thunderstorm.

"My Marcia!" he cried. "She is in trouble!"

"Oh, your Marcia's all right. And, for the matter of that, she is to be my Marcia if you mean to keep out of jail."

The padrone turned upon him savagely.

"You talk to me of a jaila? Why, you miserable worma! I takea you to jaila any time I wanta!" he threatened.

"I didn't think you'd want ter go near the bloomin' jail," put in Swikey, keeping a respectful distance from the Italian.

"Maladetto! What cana they do to me?"

"Well, me covey, I'm a-thinkin' they can salt yer down fer a term o' years, if they takes the blooming notion. An', crickey! I tell yer there's mighty little fun up there at Sing Sing."

"Swikey's been there, an' he knows," laughed Red the Fox.

"Bet yer trousers I 'as, an' I've been in prisons in the old country, too. You can't give me no pointers on prisons."

And Swikey looked around him with quite a boastful air, as he uttered this defiance.

The padrone took his seat at the side of the table, where he could face his three companions, and said, emphatically:

"I havea every onea of you righta here!" slapping his hand upon the table, palm downward, "anda I coulda crusha you as easily as if you were flies."

"Don't you believe it, padrone! The Splicer has it in for you, and you don't stand in with the police now, whatever you may think."

"We'll see, Slippera Jima!"

"Yes, we will see!" returned Jim, defiantly.

At this instant the door to the bedroom opened and Mrs. Simpson's arm appeared.

The padrone rushed at the door, but the old woman's foot was against it, and her hand was holding it, so that the padrone's pressure had no more effect than if he had been a baby.

Slippery Jim smiled at the padrone's discomfiture, and stepping over to the door, took from Mrs. Simpson's hand a folded paper that had escaped the notice of the padrone.

As Jim took the paper, Mrs. Simpson's hand disappeared, and she closed and locked the door, pushing the padrone away as easily as if he had been a fly.

Jim was looking at the paper, and it was plain that it mystified him, for he turned it upside down, sideways, and every other way, and then shook his head.

"No use. I can't see what this means. I'll have to ask the old woman."

He tapped at the door in a peculiar way with a loud tap first, followed by two soft taps, and then a loud and soft tap, but all so quickly that a listener could hardly catch the combination unless he were particularly bright.

In instant response to the signal the

door opened a little way, and Mrs. Simpson's voice was heard.

"Well, what is it?"

"Where did you get this paper?" demanded Jim.

"I found it in her pocket," was the answer, as the door closed again.

"Here, padrone. You seem to be interested in this. Look it over, and tell me what you think of it."

The padrone took the paper and looked at it eagerly.

It was nothing but a conglomeration of letters, that might mean anything or nothing. The first two lines read something like this:

meuhscdnflgaepkwtrlydgemnyixsekera
grmioslfpedkblerywakjxpdnflgvyqurs

There were about twenty lines in the letter, if it was a letter, and every line was a mere mixture, such as might be made by a printer setting up "pi."

"Wonder wherea she gota thata. It is no gooda!" declared the Italian, as he was about to throw it on the floor.

"Hold on there, padrone! If you can't make anything of that, perhaps some one else can."

"Why, it isa nothing!"

"I believe it is something; and, moreover, I believe it is something to do with the Wickworth diamonds."

"The diamon!" repeated the padrone, his eye lighting up involuntarily at the word.

"You kin bet Slippery Jim knows what he's a-chinnin' 'bout," observed Red the Fox. "Lemme see the paper!"

He took the paper and looked at it, but could make nothing of it.

"Let yer uncle get his lookers on it," interrupted Swipecy. "I'll bet a bloomin' hegg I can read it!"

But Swipecy could make nothing of it no more than the rest, and when the Chinaman took it from him and began to examine it closely, he was too much disconcerted at his own failure to give Charlie Ling a kick.

"Me know how to gettee the meaning of it!" declared the Chinaman apparently not regarding the threatening looks of Swipecy.

Slippery Jim darted at him for his presumption. "Give me that paper!" he shouted.

"Allee lightee!" and Charlie Ling handed him the paper, but jumped back before the fist of Slippery Jim could reach him.

"Me know how to finde out about that paper!" persisted the Mongolian, doggedly.

"Well, then, do it," shouted Slippery Jim, "and, for the devil's sake, don't talk any more about it."

"Allee lightee!" and evidently delighted that he had received permission to show what he could do, Charlie Ling skipped out of the room and up the stairs, leaving his companions looking into each other's faces with a more mystified expression than ever.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PROBING THE MYSTERY.

"What's 'e a-goin' ter do?" muttered Swipecy.

The others were evidently thinking what Swipecy had expressed, and when Slippery Jim suddenly moved toward the door the others followed him readily, to see what the Celestial was up to.

They reached the door of the gambling room just as the Chinaman opened it and went inside, leaving the door partly open.

Charlie Ling turned on the electric light, and the four people on the landing saw that the detective was still in a heavy sleep on the piano bedstead. The chloral that he had taken in his coffee was strong, and he was likely to remain under its influence for hours.

The Chinaman looked at the unconscious detective for a moment, and then gazed at the doorway. Whether he saw the four crouching figures behind the door or not, it is certain that he made no sign.

Jim and his companions had hidden themselves, and were peeping through the

crack of the door, but a sharp pair of eyes might have discerned them even there from inside the room, to say nothing of a cunning mind suspecting their presence anyhow.

But, perhaps Charlie Ling was not cunning. At all events, he wore an expression of most child-like innocence as he stooped over the detective and ran his hand lightly and swiftly over his coat.

At last his hand stopped immediately over the unconscious man's heart; then he drew from his blouse a long, keen dirk-knife, which he grasped in his hand with the point downward, still feeling with his other hand over the detective's heart.

"Santa Maria! Is he goinga to killa him?" whispered the padrone, as he moved uneasily, as if he would rush into the room.

Slippery Jim and Swipecy each held him with a grasp of iron.

"Keep still, padrone!" hissed Jim.

"Buta—"

"Keep still!" repeated Jim, fiercely.

The Chinaman placed the point of his knife at the spot where he had held his finger, over the detective's heart, as if making sure of his blow.

Then he elevated the knife and struck downward!

The padrone started in horror!

"Te-he!" chuckled Charlie Ling.

The point of the knife just reached the detective's coat as he laughed, but it did not go into his flesh, for there was something hard under the blade, and it was this that the point struck.

"His pocketbook! Me soonee havee it!" he chuckled.

With deft fingers he drew the knife across and across the cloth, and in another instant had thrust his long, thin fingers into the hole and drawn forth a big pocketbook.

He waved it in triumph, and flourished his knife over the face of the unconscious detective in mere wantonness.

"What is he going to do with that pocketbook? The yellow thief!" muttered Jim.

"I'll have it away from him in a brace of shakes, if yer gives the word, guv'nor," whispered Red the Fox.

"No. Keep still!" commanded Jim. "Let's see what the Chinaman is up to, anyhow."

They waited and soon beheld the Mongolian kneeling by the side of the detective, and making a desk of his body by spreading the papers from the pocketbook all over him, as he examined them at his leisure.

There was a roll of bills that the Celestial counted first, and then, chuckling, hid away somewhere in the recesses of his clothing, under his blouse.

"The cussed thief! I'll soon have that away from him!" muttered Jim.

"Oh, let me go in an' feed him one on the guff!" begged Red the Fox.

Jim placed his hand over Red the Fox's mouth to quiet him, as he kept his eyes eagerly upon the Chinaman.

There were several papers in the pocketbook that Charlie Ling did not consider of any particular importance, so he replaced them in the wallet. At last he came to the perforated paper that has been referred to more than once in these pages, and grinned triumphantly.

At the same moment Slippery Jim gave the padrone a slap on his back as the truth broke upon him.

"That infernal heathen knew what he was doing, after all!" he exclaimed.

He ran into the room, seized the Chinaman by the arm and demanded the paper.

"What papee?" asked the Celestial, innocently, as he showed that his hands were empty.

But Jim did not answer. He gave the Chinaman a shove, and the perforated paper, that Charlie Ling had held between his knees, hidden in his loose trousers, dropped to the floor.

"You are a nice, innocent young party, you are!" he said, with a grin, for he was too pleased at seeing the way to a solution of the mystery of the paper to be angry even with the Chinaman,

"Me innocentee! Yes, me velly innocent!" cried Charlie Ling, as he felt his roll of money through his blouse, to make sure that it was safe.

Red the Fox had kept his eye on Charlie Ling from the time that innocent gentleman had seized the detective's money, and now that the others were occupied with the paper, he thought it an eligible opportunity to seek what he considered restitution.

Accordingly, he slipped up behind Charlie Ling, and dexterously thrust his fingers under the blouse with a snakelike speed that surprised the Chinaman, especially when he saw the roll of bills in the hand of Red the Fox.

"I haven't been swiping leathers all my life for nothin'," muttered Red, as he saw, with an amused feeling, how surprised Charlie Ling was.

Red did not count the money now, for he was afraid that Slippery Jim might interfere. He was in the act of placing the money in his trousers pocket, when Charlie Ling sprang upon him and caught the end of the roll.

"Leggo!" growled Red the Fox.

"Givee me my money!" screamed Charlie Ling.

The two pulled against each other, and it was fortunate that the roll of bills was a thick one, for it would assuredly have been torn in two, for neither seemed to remember that bills are only paper, as they tugged away at them.

How the struggle would have ended if Slippery Jim had not interfered can hardly be told. He did interfere, however, and when he placed his heavy hand upon the roll they relinquished it without a word.

They might have supposed that Slippery Jim would pocket the money, but he didn't. He placed it carefully in the detective's pocketbook, and returned the pocketbook to the pocket of the unconscious man, as well as he could, with the fluttering rags around it.

Charlie Ling and Red the Fox both looked disconsolately at the pocket where the pocketbook could be seen nestling among the fringe of cloth, and there is little doubt that they would have taken it had there been an opportunity.

"Git!" commanded Slippery Jim, who was quite aware of their intention, and was determined to frustrate it.

He motioned to the door, and Red the Fox, Charlie Ling, Swipecy, and the padrone all filed out ahead of him.

Slippery Jim lingered a moment to compare the two papers in his hand—the perforated sheet and the mass of higgledy-piggledy letters that had been found in Marcia's pocket.

"I can't see how they have anything to do with each other, but I am morally certain that they have, somehow," he mused. "Well, I'll have to get some one else to help me."

"Vere's Slippery Jim, my tear?"

The hoarse voice of Levi Cohen was heard in the gloom of the basement, and Slippery Jim slapped his thigh as he exclaimed:

"The very man, by gracious!"

He glanced at the detective, to assure himself that the narcotic was not losing its effect, and shut and locked the door, taking the precaution to remove the key from the lock, for he suspected that Red the Fox, or Charlie Ling, or both of them, would be upstairs after that roll of bills at the first opportunity.

Levi Cohen was in his Chinese dress and had ensconced himself in Mrs. Simpson's easy chair in her little room, waiting for Slippery Jim to come down.

"Now, Levi, here's something for you to decide," exclaimed Slippery Jim, as the group of worthy gentlemen assembled in the little room, and Slippery Jim placed the two papers on the table.

Levi looked at the papers carelessly, and then announced, in a determined tone:

"I von't do nothing till I have me a cup of coffee!"

"Well, can you tell us what the paper means when you do get your coffee?" demanded Slippery Jim.

"Vait and see," was the enigmatical response.

"Get him some coffee, Charlie Ling."

The Chinaman turned to obey this peremptory order, but stopped to ask innocently:

"Allee samee coffee I gotee for Splicee and the leetle gel?"

Slippery Jim moved threateningly, and the Chinaman retreated to the kitchen, chuckling because he had been able to annoy Slippery Jim once more.

The Jew swallowed his cup of coffee deliberately, with an air of intense enjoyment, looking closely at the two papers the while, and then threw himself back in his chair with the manner of a man possessing an important secret.

"Now, Levi, what do the papers mean?" asked Slippery Jim, eagerly.

Levi looked deliberately at the papers and then at Jim, while every one waited for the oracular words that were to settle an important question.

"What do the papers mean?" he repeated. "What do they mean?"

Slippery Jim nodded anxiously.

"Vell, I have not the least idea!" answered Levi.

"Well, I'll be—jiggered!" hissed Slippery Jim, as he kicked the Chinaman to relieve his overwrought feelings.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WICKWORTH WILL.

Slippery Jim picked up his papers in such extreme disgust that he thought nothing of Levi Cohen coming here, in an apparently friendly mood, after the deadly struggle they had engaged in only a few hours before, upstairs in that very house.

Here was the means to discover something that he felt sure would give him such a pull over the padrone that it would be easy to obtain possession of Marcia for a wife, and the fortune that he knew was somehow connected with the Wickworth diamonds, and yet, for lack of a key to the cipher, he might as well not have the papers at all.

He was quite sure that the detective would not have been carrying about that paper with the holes in it for nothing, and equally sure that Marcia would not have concealed the other paper so carefully if she had not been taught that it was of the utmost importance to her own welfare.

He was looking at the two papers disconsolately, with the others standing around him, wondering whether he would let the matter drop, or insist upon prosecuting his inquiries into the significance of the documents.

"Me tellee you whatee it means," squeaked Charlie Ling.

Every one turned to give the Chinaman a kick, but that discreet gentleman was at the other end of the restaurant, behind a breastwork of tables, and out of their reach.

"You speak again, and I'll make you wish you had never left China," said Slippery Jim, savagely.

"Me wishee it now, but me can tellee you what the papee means."

Levi Cohen had been leaning back in his chair, with a thick, black cigar between his lips. He looked across at the Chinaman, and remarked quietly:

"Charlie Ling is not such a fool as he looks."

"No; me not such bigee foollee," agreed Charlie Ling, with a grin, as if he had just received a very high compliment.

"He makes me tired," grumbled Swipey.

"He gives me pneumonia," was the disgusted observation of Red the Fox.

As for the padrone, he evidently considered the Chinaman unworthy of any notice whatever, and sat twitching his fingers, as if eager to fasten them around somebody's throat, Slippery Jim's preferred.

Jim had laid the papers on the table side by side, and was looking at them from various points of view, in the hope of hitting upon some new idea concerning them.

Suddenly the Chinaman's hand shot out under Jim's arm, and snatched away the

papers like a big and exceedingly mischievous monkey.

The place was in an uproar in a moment, but Charlie Ling dodged among the tables and chairs in the restaurant, and stood at the other end, by the kitchen door, brandishing the papers, and laughing in his shrill tones, as if he enjoyed the situation amazingly—as no doubt he did, from the bottom of his heart.

"Give me those papers!" shouted Slippery Jim.

"Waitee! I show you!" was the Chinaman's response.

He laid the paper with the jumble of letters on a table, and then carefully adjusting the perforated paper over the other, chuckled with satisfaction.

Charlie Ling had been to a Sunday school for several years, and, in spite of the pigeon English he used in conversation, he could read the language fairly well.

"Te-he!" he chuckled. "Here it is. Listen!"

He bent over the papers and read slowly, but distinctly:

"The will of Walter Wickworth."

All started, and Slippery Jim, scarcely able to contain his impatience, cleared a table at a bound and snatched up the papers.

"What do you mean, you yellow brute?" he yelled.

He looked at the papers, but there was nothing to be seen on the one but the jumble of letters, and in the other the holes at irregular intervals.

Slippery Jim turned upon the Chinaman with a fierce imprecation, and would doubtless have struck him but that something in the Chinaman's manner arrested his hand.

"Me can show you," squeaked the Chinaman, "if you will givee me a chance."

The others crowded around as Charlie Ling took the perforated paper, laid it exactly over the other, and pointed to it triumphantly.

"There!" he exclaimed.

Slippery Jim looked at the paper, and then the truth broke upon him, and he shoved the Chinaman away viciously, mad to find that the heathen could give him a hint on a thing that the united understanding of his companions was unequal to unravel.

When the paper with the holes was laid exactly straight over the other, certain letters appeared through the spaces, and formed words that could be read. And this is what Slippery Jim read:

"The will of Walter Wickworth."

"I hereby bequeath everything I possess, real and personal, in the city of Chicago, to my neice, Marcia Wickworth, now in charge of Raphael Martini, in New York, on condition that the Wickworth diamonds, which disappeared from my possession twenty years ago, are produced intact, and placed in the hands of Leonard Wickworth, who must prove, to the satisfaction of my lawyers, Simpkins & Strong, of New York, that they really are the Wickworth diamonds. When the diamonds are restored, then I give permission for Leonard Wickworth to claim his daughter, Marcia, from the care of Raphael Martini, of New York, with whom she has resided since one year of her birth, as a condition that Leonard Wickworth should retain the property he now has through my gift."

This was the purport of the will, stripped of its legal verbiage, and as Slippery Jim read it he uttered a whistle of astonishment, as well as of satisfaction, for he felt that he held the happiness of Marcia and his own worldly prosperity in his own hand.

"The mean old cuss!" he ejaculated, as soon as he could get his breath.

The padrone had listened with close attention, and now, looking straight at Slippery Jim, he said:

"Wella, whata is all thata to you? I knew thata there was somea such a willa, buta I never hearda it before. Old Walter Wickworth was Leonard's brother. He wanta to marry the mother of Marcia himself, but Leonarda got her."

"Bully fer Leonard!" put in Swipey.

"Shut up!" commanded Slippery Jim.

"Yes, shuttee up!" squeaked Charlie Ling.

The padrone looked at the Chinaman with a frown that froze him up temporarily, and went on:

"Walter Wickworth never forgave his brother for thata, and to maka him feel bada, he would nota helpa him in any way unless he would promise to leta his daughter be taken from him, and kept away until she grew up. Then the mother dieda, without seeing her little girl, and I never told her. When old Walter came to die, I supposea he coulda not bringa himself to leave his mon' to anybody outside of his family, or maybe he thoughta kindly of the little girl, and he made this willa. The Wickworth diamonds were stolen twenty years ago, and he did nota expect to finda them again. This willa would keepa the mon' tieda up, and he would carry his revenge even into the gravea."

"That's a pretty good story, padrone," commented Slippery Jim. "If we find the diamonds Marcia will get the money, eh?"

"Yes."

"Now, if I get the diamonds, I think I should have the girl, don't you?"

"You geta the diamon', and I will give my consent," answered the padrone, shortly.

"Then I will get the diamonds," declared Slippery Jim. "There is one man that can tell me their whereabouts, and I will have the secret from him. I cannot fool with him any longer. All of you get to the Mott street crib, and I'll attend to the rest. Git!"

Jim Slider and Levi Cohen were rivals, but there was a determination in the younger man that Levi could never resist when Jim chose to exercise it. So Cohen, with some inward grumbling, obeyed the other, and, motioning to Swipey and Red the Fox, melted away, and walked slowly over to Mott street, with the two crooks behind him. The silent, vacant-looking Celestial would never have been recognized by the ordinary observer as one of the sharpest "fences" in New York city, and it was Levi Cohen's pride that his disguise was so good.

When they had gone there were three people left in the restaurant—Slippery Jim, the padrone and Charlie Ling.

Slippery Jim knocked at the door of Mrs. Simpson's room, and after a few moments that estimable lady presented herself, rather disheveled, as if she had been asleep.

"How is the girl?" asked Jim.

Marcia replied to this question by appearing in the doorway herself, and rushing into the padrone's arms.

"Watch her!" whispered Jim in Mrs. Simpson's ear, and he ran swiftly up the stairs to the door of the gambling room.

He argued that if the narcotic had lost its influence over Marcia, it might be supposed that the detective, with his stronger nerves, was also awake, and it would not be safe to leave him alone.

He was right in this supposition, for when he opened the door the detective was examining a pistol in his hand, and presented it point-blank at Jim when he appeared.

"It's all right, Splicer! You needn't fire," remarked Jim, coolly.

"I didn't intend to fire. But I've had so many peculiar adventures in this house that I am becoming suspicious whenever I hear a noise. Particularly when I have had a sleep that I didn't want."

The detective smiled good-naturedly, still toying with his revolver, and Jim Slider looked at him admiringly.

"You are a cool hand," the crook remarked, "but I think I have the bulge on you now. You have been playing a high game lately, but it will have to stop. I hold the cards, and when it comes to the show-down, you will find that Jim Slider won't take a bluff."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have the Wickworth diamonds, and that you will have to sign a paper saying that you have been conspiring to deprive me of my liberty on some trumped up charges, and that you know me to be an honest, honorable member of society."

The detective laughed.

"Why Slippery Jim, this is a new thing for you to desire to shine as a good citizen. You have always trusted to your own shrewdness to keep out of my reach. What has struck you?"

"I am going to be married. That's what has struck me, Splicer. And I am going to be rich, and I don't want any such fellow as you chasing after me and trying to get me into jail and other annoying predicaments."

"Where are the diamonds?"

At this instant the answer came to him in an unexpected way.

Charlie Ling, held by the padrone on one side and Mrs. Simpson on the other, was dragged into the room, and thrown at the feet of the detective and Slippery Jim.

CHAPTER XXX.)

FOUND AT LAST.

"The rascals! He havea the diamon'!" gasped the Italian, breathless with the exertion of dragging Charlie Ling up the stairs.

Before Slippery Jim could ask what it meant, the padrone placed his foot behind the Chinaman, and giving him a scientific push, sent him flat upon his back on the bed.

"Ow! Ow!" squealed Charlie Ling.

"Shut up, you Chinese pig!" growled Jim Slider. "What is it, Mrs. Simpson?"

But Mrs. Simpson was too much excited to speak. She could only point to Charlie Ling and shake her head threateningly.

The detective had been looking Charlie Ling over, and now saw something that explained the excitement of the padrone and the old woman.

It was only a piece of string hanging in the wide sleeve of the Chinaman's blouse, but it was a string that the detective recognized.

"Stand back, every one!" he shouted, flourishing his pistol in unwonted excitement. "Especially you, Slippery Jim! Padrone, watch him, and kill him if he makes a move."

No one in that room had ever seen the detective in such a state of excitement, and they knew that something extraordinary must have occurred.

The padrone, who still carried his heavy stick, with the loaded knob, flourished that weapon over the head of Jim Slider, while he drew his long knife with his right hand, and held that ready for immediate use.

Slippery Jim seemed to have lost his usual nerve, for he was standing back, looking from one to the other in a condition of bewilderment that completely overwhelmed him.

Hezekiah Dodds now cooled down a little, and became once again the plain old farmer from Illinois. He wore the farmer clothes, and the long gray whiskers were blowing to and fro in the draughts caused by so much movement in the room.

He saw that the other occupants of the room were arranged to his satisfaction; then he seized the string in the Chinaman's sleeve and pulled.

"Ow, Splicee, you hurt me!"

"I'll kill yer, gol durn yer, ef yer don't let this here string come!" replied Hezekiah, impatiently.

He gave another hard pull, at the same time kicking Charlie Ling's arm, and making him move it from his side, where he was holding it to prevent the article at the end of the string being brought forth. The Chinaman fell backward and rolled off the bed, and Hezekiah held in his hand the Wickworth diamonds.

"The diamonds!" yelled Jim Slider, moving as if he would rush upon the detective.

"Holda on there, Jima!" exclaimed the

padrone, giving Slippery Jim a warning tap on the head with the big stick.

The crook stopped, and then his manner changed to one of assumed indifference, as he said, with a sneer:

"Pshaw! These are not the diamonds! They are the bits of stone. Where would that Chinaman get the diamonds?"

"You air mistaken, Jim! These here are the diamonds, and I'll bet a farm on that there," replied Hezekiah.

"Let me see them, then."

"Hold him!" was the detective's brief direction to the Italian.

The padrone stepped behind Slippery Jim and took him by his two arms with an iron grip that could have held him for an hour, if necessary.

"Mrs. Simpson, if you move, I shall forget that you are a woman, and shoot you down in your tracks," warned the detective, sternly. "Ling, you stand on the other side of that bedstead."

The detective was not making these preparations without reason.

Entrenching himself behind the faro table, with its cards marked out upon it, he opened the chamois-leather bag, the string of which had first attracted his attention, in Charlie Ling's sleeve, and poured out the glittering stones in a heap of lustrous magnificence that made Charlie Ling blink again.

The Wickworth diamonds!

For a few seconds there was silence. The appearance of these gems, that had been stolen and restolen, and that had passed through so many hands that it was a question as to who had them, seemed to have paralyzed everybody.

Then Slippery Jim broke the spell, as, with a yell of savage rage, like that of a wild beast, he bounded forward, with hands outstretched, to grasp the gems.

He had almost reached the table, when something flashed past him from the door, and a powerful fist struck him in the forehead and felled him as a butcher drops an ox.

"Not yet, Slider!" exclaimed the voice of Levi Cohen. "If I can't get them, you won't!"

Levi Cohen stood in the middle of the room, in his Chinaman's dress, and it was he who had struck down the crook.

"You tried to play dirt on me, Jeem, and now I gets me even. See?"

But Slippery Jim was unconscious. The blow had been a terrific one, and it was hours before he became conscious. There was a hurried call for an ambulance, and Slippery Jim went to the Hudson street hospital, where he was examined, and ultimately taken to Bellevue Hospital, from which he never came forth alive.

There is little more to tell.

Marcia went to Chicago and took possession of her property. Her father, Leonard Wickworth, was a business man, whose time was too much occupied with his warehouse and offices to care very much about his daughter. He was a good man, in his way, and did what he could to enable his pretty young daughter to assume her proper place in society, but he was never as much to her as her other father, Raphael Martini, the padrone, with all his grievous faults. So, when, a year after the recovery of the Wickworth diamonds, Leonard Wickworth died, Marcia mourned him dutifully, but perhaps not very deeply.

Raphael Martini was given a chance by the invincible detective to reform, and he did so. It was found that his chief offense was hiding criminals, and that he had never committed any serious crime himself, so that it was comparatively easy to keep him out of the clutches of the law, with influential friends in the police department. He lives with his daughter, his little girl, Marcia, in a handsome residence in Chicago, and attends to the extensive real estate owned by her. When she marries, as she may at any time, for she is very popular in society, he says he will live as near to her as possible, and his only desire is to see her perfectly happy.

Levi Cohen was tried for the homicide of Slippery Jim, and is in the State's Prison.

Swipey and Red the Fox disappeared the night the Wickworth diamonds were found, and it is supposed that they pursued their trade of stealing in London for a time, especially as two men answering to their description were recently sent into penal servitude for a term of years from the Old Bailey.

Mrs. Simpson's restaurant on West street no longer exists, and the cheese, butter and eggs have it all their own way in the building. As for Mrs. Simpson herself, she has taken up her abode in another part of New York, where her motherly appearance and pleasant manners have enabled her to conduct a select boarding-house with considerable profit and comfort.

There are plenty of robberies as big and complicated as those of the Wickworth diamonds, and when anything extraordinary calls for the services of a good man either in Chicago or New York, you may be sure that the man chosen is nearly always that master of disguises, who prefers generally to work in the character of Hezekiah Dodds, the Hayseed Detective.

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